

The BUFFALO BILL

Devoted To

Far West Life



BUFFALO BILL'S ENIGMA

OR PAWNEE BILL
AND THE HOUSE OF MYSTERYBY THE AUTHOR OF
"BUFFALO BILL"

Suddenly the heavy door was thrown outward, striking the scout and hurling him to the ground. Bear Paw, with a snort, leaped backward, tearing the reins from the scout's hand.

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THE BUFFALO BILL



A WEEKLY PUBLICATION **STORIES** DEVOTED TO BORDER LIFE

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BUFFALO BILL'S ENIGMA;

OR,

Pawnee Bill and the House of Mystery.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

THE "LADIES' AID."

"The question is, sisters," and Miss Minerva Skilo looked up from her knitting, "are we goin' to suffer them poor human bein's to remain in that jail without any friendly ministrations? Are we heathen, or ain't we heathen?"

"We ain't!" declared Mrs. Perry Blazer, pinning her sewing firmly to her knee. "I got it from Perry that the pris'ners have got iron manacles on their hands and feet. Imagine! Jest imagine that in a civilized country. It makes me that mortified I could almost die."

"I never heard of sich savage doin's, honest to goodness I never did!" This from Mrs. Peterson, as her nimble fingers worked a bobbin in and out of a mass of tatting. "Law sakes, if anybody had ever told me I'd 'a' married a man who'd mix up in sich barbarous proceedin's I'd never have believed it."

"It was all that Mortimer Degard's doin's, Sister Peterson," remarked Mrs. Herrick.

"Indeed and it was!" affirmed Mrs. Dolliver. "I got the whole of it from Derry. It was Mort Degard who suggested offerin' five thousand dollars reward for the capture of Ponca Dave, in the first place. I'm not blamin' Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, and the rest for capturin' Ponca Dave, nor for capturing Black Salvadore and saving Mortimer Degard; but, sisters, that five thousand dollars would have done a lot of good to the poor, benighted Zulus."

Every member of the sewing circle drew a long sigh.

Miss Minerva Skilo was knitting a pair of slippers for the Zulus; Mrs. Blazer was making a red kimono for the same poor, benighted creatures; Mrs. Peterson's tatting was also to find its way into the box which the Poverty Flat Ladies' Aid Society was to ship to South Africa; and all the others were engaged in work that had to do with the same misdirected philanthropy.

Most of the members of the Ladies' Aid Society were wives of well-to-do cattlemen. These influential cattlemen had gathered at Poverty Flat to deal with the question of the Ponca raiders—thieves who had harried their herds of horses and longhorns. The leaders of the gang—Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore—had been caught and placed in the Poverty Flat jail by the scout and his pards, and the members of the Ladies' Aid Society were very much exercised over the welfare of the prisoners.

"I never had no use for half-breeds or Injuns," observed Miss Minerva Skilo, "although they has their place in Nature and are entitled to consideration and fair treatment. This Black Salvadore is a half-breed, but jest think, sisters, of stayin' in a hot an' stuffy jail with manacles on your hands an' feet! Why, it's a disgrace; a blot on the fair name of this town."

"It's tur'ble!" murmured Mrs. Perry Blazer. "I've always said—you remember, don't you, Sister Peterson?—that Mort Degard ought to have a wife to pilot him along the road he ought to travel."

"I've said that same thing, Sister Blazer," answered Mrs. Peterson, "time and time ag'in."

"I move," said Sister Herrick, "that this Aid Society wait on those prisoners in a body and carry them some creature comforts."

"I'll take a bokay!" cried Mrs. Blazer enthusiastically, waving her hand at a bunch of wild flowers which she had gathered for the delectation of the Society during the sewing bee. "That bokay will do the pris'ners more good than it will us. Why, it will give 'em a whiff of the plains, the great, free plains, which they ain't never to roam ag'in."

Mrs. Peterson arose to her feet, her face flushed with a spirit of self-sacrifice.

"Sisters," she cried, unraveling several stitches as she waved her work in one hand and her bobbin in the other, "we got two quarts of ice cream, made for us by the cook at the Spread Eagle Hotel. Suppose we take that ice cream to the poor pris'ners in their hot an' stuffy cells!"

The suggestion was received with delight. When there was a little quiet, Miss Minerva Skilo got on her feet.

"Sisters," said Miss Skilo, "I have some tracts for them pris'ners, too. We'll take the tracts along with the ice cream and the flowers. It was me brought up the subject of the pris'ners, and I brought it up because there came to my house this mornin' a half-breed girl who says she's Black Salvadore's sister. She wanted this philanthropic society to do somethin' to alleviate her brother's sad plight, and I promised the poor girl I'd bring the matter before you. She said she'd call here to find out what we'd do, if anythin', an' I'm expectin' her any minit."

"I, for one," said Mrs. Herrick, "am glad she's coming. My husband always says that charity ought to begin at home, and not jump blindly into South Africa when there's so much to be done right around Poverty Flat. I reckon Herrick won't find any fault when he knows what we're doing for the pris'ners."

"Will they let us into the jail?" queried Mrs. Derry Dolliver.

"They will," asserted Mrs. Peterson, "or I'll give Peterson a talkin' to that he won't fergit in a hurry. We'll git into the jail, all right, Sister Dolliver, and——"

A rap fell on the door.

"That's her now," said Miss Minerva Skilo, hurrying to open the door.

A swarthy young woman in a gingham dress and sun-bonnet, carrying a basket on her arm, entered the room.

"How de do, Cactus Blossom?" cried Miss Skilo, seizing the young woman's hand. "We're goin' to do somethin' for your brother—we'd jest made up our minds to it. Ladies," and she turned to the rest of the society, "this here is Cactus Blossom, Black Salvadore's sister. She don't live in the Flat, but she come in to be around town while her brother's in jail."

The Aid Society, carried away by generous sentiments, flocked around Cactus Blossom and caressed and sympathized with her in her affliction.

"Mebbeso you take Salvadore something, huh?" inquired Cactus Blossom, greatly embarrassed by the era of good feeling into which she found herself thus suddenly plunged.

"Flowers and ice cream, Cactus Blossom," beamed Mrs. Herrick. "We're going to the jail in a body and relieve the sufferings of the poor, suffering pris'ners."

"Good!" answered Cactus Blossom, seizing Sister Herrick's hand and pressing it to her lips.

"How touchin'!" whispered Miss Skilo to Mrs. Perry Blazer.

"Kindness ain't never throwed away," Mrs. Blazer whispered back to Miss Skilo.

"You take 'em chuck, too, huh?" asked Cactus Blossom, diving into her basket and pulling out a roast turkey. "Me ketch um turk for Salvadore, cook um, but the man at the jail no let Cactus Blossom give um turk to Salvadore."

"That man at the jail is a brute!" flared Mrs. Dolliver. "You go 'long with us, Cactus Blossom, an' I'll bet a copper cent Salvadore gits the turkey. They won't dare try to keep us out o' the jail."

Cactus Blossom slumped into a chair and began to weep.

"Chirk up, Cactus Blossom!" urged Mrs. Peterson. "We ain't all heathens in Poverty Flat."

The half-breed girl drew the back of her hand across her eyes and looked up.

"It's a heap better," said she plaintively, "if I don't go. You take um turk to Salvadore, please. You good lady."

"It might prejudice the keeper of the jail ag'in us," remarked Miss Skilo, after a period of thought, "if we took Cactus Blossom along. It's jest as well, sisters, to let her go back where she stays, an' we'll tote the turkey along with the ice cream and the flowers."

"Women aint' got no rights any more," said Mrs. Perry Blazer. "See how this poor thing is imposed on because she's a half-breed, an' for nothin' else. Yes, sisters," and she shook her clenched hand, "we'll tote the trukey to the jail an' we'll get it into the hands of Black Salvadore, too. My, but it's a heavy turkey," and she lifted the roasted fowl and balanced it in her hands.

"You heap good ladies, every one!" gurgled Cactus Blossom.

Then she began and kissed the hand of every member of the Ladies' Aid Society. When this osculatory feat had been performed, she faded from the room, wiping her eyes as she went.

Miss Minerva Skilo flicked away a truant tear from behind her glasses.

"Doin' good to folks in distress," said she, "is an easy thing, an' gives a cheery feelin' to the heart. Cactus Blossom, sisters, would lay down her life for any one of us."

"I wonder what's her persuasion?" inquired Mrs. Derry Dolliver.

"I don't reckon she has any," answered Mrs. Perry Blazer. "Half-breeds, like that, don't have the advantages of their white sisters. Shall we start for the jail?"

"Yes, let's," came the general response.

Work was laid aside, and the eight members of the society put on their bonnets and trailed out of the room in column of twos.

Mrs. Perry Blazer, with her "bokay," and Miss Minerva Skilo with the basket containing the roast turkey, headed the procession.

Mrs. Peterson and Mrs. Herrick came next with the bucket containing the ice cream, and the others followed, smiling, but determined.

The procession marched down the dusty main street, watched with awe and curiosity by the townspeople. During the march, Mrs. Herrick picked up her husband, and Mrs. Blazer picked up Blazer, and Mrs. Dolliver

picked up Dolliver. On the way to the jail the situation was explained to the cattlemen.

The cattlemen objected to the performance, declaring that Ponca Dave and Black Salvatore were a pair of thieving scoundrels and deserved all the punishment that was coming to them. They demanded that the procession break up, and that the members go back to their sewing. The Aid Society wouldn't listen, so the cattlemen compromised with the society and agreed to let them visit the jail and hand over the flowers, and the turkey, and the ice cream to the prisoners.

It was not many hours before the three cattlemen were sorry they had "compromised."

CHAPTER II.

AN INVITATION—AND A THREAT.

"Waugh! Ain't he dazzlin', Buffler? Fer why is Pawnee puttin' on so much dog this arternoon?"

The excitement attending the march of the Ladies' Aid Society to and from the jail, had died down somewhat. The townspeople were discussing the event with broad smiles, and on the veranda, in front of the Spread Eagle Hotel, Buffalo Bill was listening to his trapper pard on the subject of woman's rights, mite societies, and the folly of committing matrimony and serving a life sentence for it.

Abruptly old Nomad broke off his remarks along that particular line, leaned over the veranda railing, and pointed up the street.

The scout, following the leveled finger with his eyes, saw Pawnee Bill cantering toward the veranda on his big buckskin, Chick-Chick. The prince of the bowie was more ornamental than the scout had ever seen him before.

He was garbed as a Mexican *rico*, and his trim, sinewy form had never shown to better advantage.

Pawnee's high Mexican hat had hawk's bells jingling along the brim. The wizard had transferred his bullion band from his sombrero to the hat with the peaked crown, so that with the band and the hawk's bells, the greaser headgear had become as radiant as it was musical.

Jacket and trousers were of brown velvet, the trousers slashed, Mexican fashion, below the knee and laced with tinsel cord. Gold buttons ornamented the trousers along the outer seams, and they were caught in at the waist with gilt clasps. The jacket, gleaming with big silver buttons, opened at the front to disclose ruffles of spotless linen.

At his belt Pawnee carried his twin destroyers—forty-five caliber revolvers whimsically known as "Tom and Jerry." The holsters were pushed well back toward either hip. Out of a scabbard in front peeped the gold handle of Ta-koon-wan-kan, the famous Price knife of which Pawnee Bill was prince and master.

Half covering the belt, fluted with cartridges, was a brown sash of heavy silk. Slunk in its case under the right stirrup leather was the eight-square buffalo gun, called "Old Spitfire" by the prince of the bowie.

Chick-Chick, like his master, was gay with unusual trappings, and the barbaric splendor of the spectacle, as Pawnee Bill halted with a flourish close to the veranda

rail, caused the old trapper to throw up his hands and blink.

"Scoot-a-wah-boo!" laughed the prince of the bowie. "How's this for a show, pards?"

"Et's some blindin' ter the eyes, Pawnee," answered Nomad. "Whyever hev ye done et, compadre? An' whar aire ye headin' in all yore dazzlin' splendor?"

"That's what I'd like to know, compadre," laughed the scout. "What's your excuse?"

"Well," chuckled Pawnee Bill, "I've sworn by my 'medicine' to cut a splurge at the greaser *baile* over toward Adobe Walls this evening."

"*Baile?*" echoed old Nomad. "I'm some partial ter *bailes* myself. Whyever didn't ye tell me erbout this 'un, Pawnee, so'st the baron an' me could hev trailed erlong with ye? Ef et ain't till night, then we got time yit."

"On-she-ma-da, pard! I'm the only one of Buffalo Bill's pards who's going to attend this *baile*."

"Why?" asked the scout, sensing a fact of importance somewhere at the back of Pawnee Bill's head.

"Because," smiled the prince of the bowie, "I've a weakness for braiding the tail of a mule and feeling the teeth of a bobcat with my fingers."

"Ye're torkin' Siwash, amigo," fretted Nomad. "Put et inter plain United States, kain't ye?"

"Ap-pe-tu-we!"

Pawnee Bill removed his hat and fished from its crown a playing card. This he handed to the scout.

"Read that, *necarnis*," said he.

The card was the ace of clubs. Around the single pip was written:

"If the prince of the bowie is as brave as they say, will he dare come to Sebastian's *baile* to-night? Will he dare come alone? Let him outshine the other caballeros, making himself a bright mark for his foes."

The queer invitation was not signed. It was written in a feminine hand—a fact which made the veiled threat scarcely less dangerous.

"I don't like the looks of this, pard," said the scout.

"Talk-a-heap is a fine brave," returned Pawnee Bill sententiously, "but Do-a-heap is a better. I want to find out what's at the bottom of that."

"And you're determined to probe the mystery single-handed?"

"Yes."

"Well, Pawnee, I wish you all kinds of luck; and I have this to say: If you're not back in the Flat at sunrise to-morrow, your pards will be looking for you in the direction of Sebastian's."

Pawnee Bill lighted a cigar.

"I'll circulate prominently around this fandango," said he, "and I'll trip through a bolero with the writer of that invitation. What's more, *necarnis*, I'll be back at the Flat by sunup."

The glint in the eyes and the snap of the jaws, all went to prove the determination of the prince of the bowie.

"Who gave you that bid to the *baile*, Pawnee?" asked the scout.

"Some one pushed it under the door of my room before I got up." He gathered in his reins. "Well, *necarnis*, it's getting along toward next sleep, and I'm going to ride easy to Sebastian's. *Adios!*"

"*Adios!*"

Pawnee Bill clinked off down the street, smoking and singing as he went:

No me mates, no me mates,
Con pistola ne punal;
Matame con un besito,
De tus labios de coral.

"He's a fine figger of a man, thet Pawnee pard o' our'n," commented Nomad, gazing until the flashing horseman had faded into a pall of dust.

"So he is, old pard," answered the scout. "What's more, it will take more than a handful of greasers to entangle him in a kibosh of any proportions. But I'll be glad to see him back here in the morning."

Jeff Holloway, proprietor of the Spread Eagle Hotel, appeared on the porch with a face that expressed great dejection.

"Ye know that turkey I had cooped up back o' the hotel, Buffalo Bill?" he asked. "The bird I got from Pocotone 'specially for a Sunday dinner for you an' your pards?"

"Yes, Jeff," answered the scout. "What of it?"

"Why, when the chink cook went out ter feed that thar turkey, an hour ago, the turkey wasn't thar. Somebody has made off with the bird. Wouldn't that rattle your spurs? I feel a heap more worked up about that thar turkey, friend, than if some un had rifled the hotel till o' fifty plunks."

"Don't fret about the turkey, Jeff," laughed the scout. "We'll put up with canned stuff for our Sunday dinner."

"Near as I kin find out," went on Holloway, "the bird must 'a' been took last night. The chink had orders to feed an' water the bird twicet a day, but ye kain't depend on chinks ter do nothin'. I'd got my heart sot on dishin' that turkey up ter you an' the Cochise Cattlemen, next Sunday, makin' a spread that 'u'd lay over anythin' that was ever dished up in these parts. Now——"

Just then the Chinese waiter came out of the hotel and blew a blast on a tin trumpet.

"We'll go in to supper," said the scout, rising, "and try and forget all about the turkey."

"Turkey ain't in et with jerked beef nohow," averred the trapper.

Following supper, the scout and his pards, Nomad, the baron and Little Cayuse, whiled away a few evening hours on the hotel veranda.

The baron was very much cast down because Pawnee Bill had gone off to the *baile* without taking any of his friends with him.

"I like to tance pedder as I can tell," said the baron, "und dose Mexican tances vas fine, yah, I bed you. Dere iss a guitar vat makes der moosic, und vile it goes blink-blink-blinkety-blink den you cut some capers mit your-seluf. Ach, it iss fine!"

"An' then, when ye ain't lookin'," put in the trapper, "some greaser reaches after ye from behind, with a dirk. Waugh! Yes, baron, et shore is fine."

"Anyways," went on the baron, "I wish like anyt'ing dot Pawnee hat asked me to go along mit him. Aber it can't be heluped now, so it makes no never minds."

"Thet's the sperrit, baron," approved the old trapper. "When ye kain't help a thing, then make the most o' et."

"Dit you hear vat der Laties' Ait Sociedy dit py der chail?" inquired the baron, lapsing into the town gossip. "Dey took some flowers, und a roast durkey, and some ice cream to dose raiter fellers. Vat a foolishness."

"Roast turkey?" inquired the scout, getting up and knocking the ashes out of his pipe.

"Yah, so."

"Wonder where the Ladies' Aid Society got the roast turkey?"

"Nopody knows dot."

The scout went up to bed. Turkeys were scarce in Poverty Flat—so scarce that Jeff Holloway had to send to Pocotone after the one he had been intending to serve for Sunday dinner. Had the Ladies' Aid Society sent to Pocotone after a turkey for Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore? Perhaps there was no connection between the loss of Jeff Holloway's turkey and this donation made by the Aid Society to the prisoners in the jail, but this double deal in turkeys had a curious look.

The scout went to bed and slept for several hours. When he awoke, he sat up in bed with a start. The windows of the hotel were rattling and the echoes of an explosion were dying away in the town.

Something had happened—but what?

A dead silence followed the last, shivering echo; then an excited voice was heard yelling in the main street.

Leaping from his bed, Buffalo Bill rushed to a window and threw it open.

"Hello, there!" he shouted, at the top of his voice. "What's happened?"

"Jail's blowed up!" answered the wild voice from the street; "pris'ners hev hiked! Wouldn't this knock ye slab-slided? Whoop-ya! Whoop-ya!" and away went the frantic townsman, howling the alarm at the top of his voice.

CHAPTER III.

TURKEY WITH BOMB DRESSING.

Buffalo Bill was astounded. His astonishment, however, did not prevent him from beginning a hurried scramble into his clothes.

Ponca Dave, leader of the red raiders, had been captured by the scout and his pards, and for this work the Cochise cattlemen had paid over a reward of five thousand dollars in gold. This reward the pards had requested the cattlemen to give, as a wedding present, to Mrs. Morey, a young lady who had been caught in the tangle of events that had resulted in Ponca Dave's capture.

Later, and while Ponca Dave was in the Poverty Flat jail, Black Salvadore, his lieutenant, had made a prisoner of Mortimer Degard, president of the Cattleman's Association, and had sent word to the Flat that the price of Degard's life was the liberty of Ponca Dave. It was history, now, how the pards had laid hold of this fresh complication, and had not only released Degard, but also captured Salvadore.*

To have all this work set aside by a sudden and mysterious jail delivery, was enough to arouse the scout to the highest pitch.

The hotel awoke to life as he hurriedly dressed, and a growing clamor of excited voices came from the street.

As he ran out of his room, buckling on his revolvers as he went, the scout encountered Nomad.

"Et ain't possible, is et, Buffler," demanded the trap-

*See No. 484 of the BUFFALO BILL AND PAWNEE BILL STORIES, "Buffalo Bill's Boldest Stroke; or, Pawnee Bill's Riata Dance."

per, "thet Ponca Dave an' Black Salvadore hev busted out o' ther jail?"

"That's what I hear, pard," the scout answered. "Get into the rest of your clothes and follow me to the lock-up."

The office of the hotel was full of people. As fast as one detachment would race away in the direction of the jail, another detachment would drop in and ask for news.

"What's the latest, Jeff?" asked the scout of the half-clad proprietor.

Holloway was talking with two men who had just come down from upstairs.

"Ye kin hear almost anythin', Buffalo Bill," answered Holloway, "but I reckon aobut all ye kin believe is that the jail has been blowed up, an' that them two raiders hev pulled the pin on law an' order an' taken to the open."

Just at this moment a bareheaded man in his shirt sleeves rushed into the office from the street.

"Whar's Buffler Bill?" he whooped.

"Here," answered the scout, stepping forward.

The man was Jim Presidio, and the scout recognized him as a deputy sheriff.

"Dick Oberlee wants ye at the jail, hot foot," said Presidio.

He whirled and dashed out through the door again, the scout running along at his side.

"It's the queerest thing I ever heerd of," panted Presidio as he and the scout made their way at a run through the noisy street. "Ponca Dave an' Black Salvadore blowed a hole in the side o' the jail an' walked clear."

"They got away?"

"Oberlee has sent riders arter 'em; an' as soon as any one shows up with a hoss, he keeps sendin' 'em. But it's a cinch that, if them raiders was able ter git out o' jail, they've got sense enough ter avoid bein' ketched."

"They were in double irons, weren't they?"

"Yes."

"Then that explosion couldn't have knocked the irons off their hands and feet. How did they get rid of the manacles?"

"Nobody savvies that, or anythin' else. Dick Oberlee's about locoed with it all—that's why he sent fer you. He reckons that if you kain't figger this out that no one kin."

By then, the scout and Presidio were at the jail. Lanterns and torches were weaving fiery lines through the gloom under the jail walls, and loud and excited talk was heard in all directions.

The jail was an adobe structure, with thick walls. It was only one story in height, and the part occupied by the cells was reinforced with a boiler-plate lining.

"This way," said Presidio, and led the scout to the south side of the structure.

Here a large crowd was gathered, and foremost among the crowd was Dick Oberlee, the sheriff. The many lights struck on the sheriff's haggard but determined face as he turned toward the approaching scout.

"Cody!" exclaimed Oberlee; "you're the man I'm waiting for. What do you think of this?"

He waved a hand at the breach in the shattered wall. A tremendous explosion must have caused that breach, for a big section of the solid wall had been thrown down and outward. The gap ran from foundation to roof, and the roof itself sagged over the rent.

"It took a big explosion to do that," remarked the scout, after passing his eyes over the yawning hole.

"Sure!" answered Oberlee. "And what caused the ex-

plosion? How were the prisoners, double-ironed as I kept them, able to engineer such a blow-up?"

"Let's go inside," said the scout, "and take a look around."

After ordering the rest of the crowd to keep back, the sheriff followed the scout over the debris of the wall, and in through the dark gap. The sheriff carried a lantern.

The outer wall of one cell had been blown away, and the boiler plate had been torn like tissue paper.

"This was Black Salvadore's cell," explained the sheriff, "and the next one, there, was Ponca Dave's. Each of the raiders was kept by himself, and each had on ankle and wrist irons."

"Ponca Dave must have come into this cell in order to get out."

"Here's how he came."

Oberlee waved the lantern in front of the bars that divided the two cells. Three of the bars had been cut away near the floor, leaving an opening through which a man could crawl.

"They were sawed or filed," said the scout, passing his fingers over the ends of the severed bars.

"But what with?" cried the demoralized sheriff. "Where'd the prisoners get their tools to work with? Where'd they get their powder for the explosion? How'd they get rid of their manacles?"

"If they had tools for cutting the bars, Oberlee," answered the scout, "then the same tools would have helped them to get out of their leg and wrist irons."

"It wasn't possible! It——"

"We've got to take things as we find them," interrupted the scout. "It must have been possible, you see, because it actually happened."

Taking the lantern from Oberlee's hand, the scout swung it around so as to give him a good view of the three remaining barred walls.

"The entire force of that explosion seems to have exerted itself outward," he remarked. "The bars in the side and front walls don't show any signs of having been wrenched by the blow-up."

"Some one was hurt, anyhow," said the sheriff. "Hold the lantern here a minute, Cody."

The scout dropped the light over the place indicated by the sheriff and found a red stain on the floor of the cell.

"It's a wonder," commented the scout grimly, "that Black Salvadore wasn't wiped out entirely, instead of merely wounded. The nerve of a man, staying in this small barred room while a charge of powder, as powerful as that must have been, was set off! But maybe he didn't stay in the room."

"He had to stay in the cell!" declared the excited sheriff.

"Not necessarily," came from the scout. "He could have crawled into Ponca Dave's cell just before the blast let go. A piece of debris, flying between the bars, may have struck either Ponca Dave or Salvadore. Ah!" he finished abruptly, "what's this?"

His foot had kicked against an object that clattered on the cell floor. Picking the object up, he discovered that it was a diminutive steel saw with a folding handle. A further search revealed a three-cornered file, badly worn, a small piece of copper, and the half of a pair of handcuffs. While the scout was gathering these mementos, Oberlee had picked up the carcass of the roast turkey, some more stray pieces of manacles, and another badly worn file.

"The explosion was caused by a bomb," asserted the scout.

"Somebody set it off outside the wall, eh?" queried the sheriff.

"No, Oberlee, it was set off from inside. The wall was blown *outward*, and that proves that the explosion came from within the jail. It was a copper bomb—here's a piece of it—and evidently it was homemade. This small hacksaw and the files were the tools used for getting rid of the manacles and cutting the bars between the cells. Are there any other prisoners in the jail, Oberlee?"

"One more—Job Hickley, the bullion thief, from the Montezuma district. He's safe, though, and hadn't any hand in the game the raiders worked."

"Who was on guard?"

"Jim was in the front office. We've both been camping out in the jail since these raiders have been here, but I went over home about eleven o'clock. What gets me is where all those tools and the bomb came from. Not a thing got to the prisoners without being looked over by Jim or me, and nobody was allowed to visit the men, or talk with 'em. I was mighty careful about that, for Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore were slippery propositions."

"Well, the bomb and the tools got to them somehow, and——"

A laugh came from across the corridor.

"I got some o' the ice cream an' a leg o' the turkey," called a husky voice, "so I reckon I hadn't ort ter tell, but it was that Ladies' Aid outfit as helped the raiders turn the trick."

"The Ladies' Aid Society, Hickley?" answered Oberlee, opening the cell door and stepping through into the corridor. "That's all foolishness, man!"

"Nary, it ain't!" chuckled Hickley. "That turkey was sarved with bomb dressin', an' stuffed with tools fer workin' iron. I seen how the job was done, an' I'm givin' ye the straight o' it."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DUPLICITY OF CACTUS BLOSSOM.

Oberlee was dazed for a minute, and then he gave way to a wrathful outburst.

"I'll bet dollars against chalk marks," said he, "that that's the way of it. That Ladies' Aid Society came meddling here, and they helped Ponca Dave and Salvadore a heap more than they had any notion."

"Where did they get that turkey?" asked the scout.

"Mrs. Herrick told me that Salvadore's sister gave it to them and asked them to tote it to the jail along with the flowers and the ice cream. Oh, hang such foolishness!" cried the sheriff, his disgust breaking from him furiously. "That half-breed girl came here three times, with a basket, and tried to get in to see Black Salvadore, but Jim and I ordered her off."

"When this Ladies' Aid Society came along, though, they had Herrick, and Derry Dolliver, and Blazer with them. Herrick, Dolliver, and Blazer said it was all right to let the women go in. What could I do, when three of the Cochise Cattlemen's Association backed up the request of the Aid Society? And besides, most of the society's members are wives of the cattlemen."

The scout stepped across to the door of Job Hickley's cell.

"What do you know about this game Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore were playing, Hickley?" he asked.

"I know that they promised to let me clear out with 'em if I didn't give the snap away," was the response, "but arter that bomb went off, they jest looked arter themselves an' didn't pay no attention to me. If they'd done what they said they would, I'd 'a' been out o' this jail myself, about now."

"The bomb, and the files, and that saw were in the carcass of the turkey?"

"That's what they was. As soon as them Aid Society people went away, Black Salvadore began sawin' the bars between his cell an' Ponca Dave's. He was keeful, an' he used soap to keep the saw from makin' too much noise. While the breed was workin' at the bars, Ponca Dave was watchin' fer Presidio or Oberlee to come; an', while he watched, he had one o' the files between his knees and was workin' his cuffs up an' down on the edge."

The scout examined the carcass of the fowl and showed the sheriff how it would have been possible to conceal the files and the bomb inside of it.

"Blamest thing I ever heard of," grunted Oberlee, "but that's how the scheme was worked, all right enough. While Ponca Dave watched for me or Jim to show up, Black Salvadore did his sawing."

"When the lights was put out," continued Hickley, "them raiders kept right on with their preparations. I couldn't see what they done, but I managed ter keep track o' what was goin' on by usin' my ears. I was afeared, when they got ready to plant the bomb, that it 'ud flare back acrost the corridor, but Black Salvadore allowed he knowed how to fix it so'st it would throw the wall an' everythin' else out. I'd 'a' yelled, I reckon, an' give the whole game away if they hadn't promised to take me with 'em. Reckoned I'd run the risk for the sake o' gettin' my liberty—an' then I didn't git my liberty arter all."

Job Hickley swore a little by way of easing his disappointment.

"Did the raiders say anything about where they were going?" the scout inquired.

"Nary a thing. From what they said, howsumever, I took it that somebody had got hosses ready fer 'em."

"Somebody! Did they say who?"

"This gal Salvadore called Cactus Blossom. She got the saw an' the files an' the bomb in Pocotone."

"I had my suspicions of that half-breed woman," declared Oberlee.

"Do you know where she's staying?" went on the scout.

"In a shack on the edge of town. I had Jim follow her the last time she came to the jail and wanted to see Salvadore."

"Who lives in the shack? I suppose the girl is only staying there for a while, and that she doesn't live in Poverty Flat."

"It was a deserted shack—nobody living in it. The girl just moved in so as to have a place to stay while she was fixing up things for Black Salvadore."

"Send over there at once, Oberlee," said the scout. "If the girl's there, have her brought to the jail; if she isn't there, have those you send try to find out where she's gone."

"I'll do it," answered the sheriff. "If I'd had my wits about me, I'd have done that before—just on suspicion."

"If you can see any of my pards outside," said the scout, "have them go along."

Oberlee left, returning presently to report that he had sent Nomad and Presidio.

"Every horseman you can get, Oberlee," said the scout, "ought to be sent in pursuit."

"I don't think there's much use," was the dejected answer. "If it was daylight, there might be some show of a pursuit making good; but, as it is, those raiders can dodge away into the dark and snap their fingers at any one who tries to follow them. They've got horses, Buffalo Bill; don't overlook that. Cactus Blossom seems to have thought of everything."

The scout and the sheriff walked along the corridor and into the office in the front part of the jail building. There they found Mortimer Degard, president of the Cochise Cattlemen's Association, and also Herrick, Blazer, and Dolliver.

"Here's a fine kettle o' fish!" shouted Degard. "Ain't we ever going to get through being pestered with those raiders? The more we do to corral them, the more trouble we have for our pains."

"That's right!" exclaimed Herrick angrily. "What kind of a sheriff has this county got, anyhow? After we pay for having prisoners corraled and run in, Oberlee, I should think you could take care of them."

"If ye ain't the man fer the office o' sheriff," growled Perry Blazer, "the cattlemen'll see that some un else is elected."

"Yore head'll be in the basket next election, all right, Oberlee!" snorted Dolliver.

This fault-finding on the part of the cattlemen was rather amusing to the scout. Not knowing that the escape of the raiders had been the direct result of the meddling of the Ladies' Aid Society, they were somewhat premature in spilling the vials of their wrath.

A grin flickered across the worried face of the sheriff. "It ain't no laughin' matter!" scowled Blazer, noticing the grin.

"Yes, it is," insisted Oberlee, and proceeded to tell the cattlemen how the bomb, the files and the saw had been conveyed to the prisoners.

Herrick, Blazer, and Dolliver were dumfounded. For a time not one of them could speak, but stared blankly at each other.

Mortimer Degard, however, had fluent use of his tongue.

"You're a fine set, you are!" said he scathingly, turning his glittering eyes on his fellow cattlemen. "You ought to be making embroidery for the Zulus, or settin' log-cabin quilts together for the poor, benighted Hottentots! Didn't you have any savvy at all when you looked at that turkey? Great guns!"

He turned from the three cattlemen in disgust and faced the sheriff.

"Oberlee, *pardoname!*" said he. "You're a man of sand and sagacity, and the rank and file of the Cochise Association are the ones who are to blame. We're just where we were when Buffalo Bill and pards started in to capture the raiders."

Just at that moment, Nomad and Presidio entered the jail office.

"What luck, Jim?" called the sheriff.

"No luck at all, Dick," replied the deputy.

"Didn't you find anything at the shack?"

"Nothin' but turkey feathers. The gal was gone, slick an' clean."

"Did she leave any sign as to which way she went, Nick?" put in the scout.

"Not a sign, Buffler," said the old trapper. "That thar is a foxy *moharrie*, all right."

"Where's the baron?"

"Pasearin' around lookin' fer raiders."

"Well, pard, you and the baron get your horses. See if you can do anything to pick up the trail of the escaped raiders. One of them was wounded by the explosion in the jail, and that fact may make it necessary for them to proceed slowly in their getaway. Don't stay away more than two or three hours: If you don't find any promising clues—and it will be hard to pick up clues in the dark—come back and we'll all hit the trail in the morning."

The trapper hurried out of the jail.

"You'll still stand by us, Buffalo Bill?" asked Mortimer Degard.

"I don't feel like leaving Poverty Flat while those two raiders are at large," said the scout. "All our work—and it wasn't easy work, by any means—has been kicked over by what's happened to-night. It's an unsatisfactory condition of affairs, and I think Cody and pards ought to see what they can do."

"Us fellers went lame," said Perry Blazer sheepishly, "but I don't reckon we could do anythin' diff'rent than what we did. I'd be willin' ter pay somethin' ter hev them raiders back hyer in the jail ag'in."

Herrick and Dolliver were also willing to "pay something." The scout said they would talk about that later, and went out to the front of the jail. As he stood there, looking at the curious people who were moving around the jail wall, some one came close and caught his sleeve.

"Pa-e-has-ka!" murmured the familiar voice of the little Piute.

"What is it, Cayuse?" the scout asked.

"You come 'long with Cayuse, Pa-e-has-ka. All same Cayuse find something. Mebbeso you better know *muy pronto*."

From the lad's manner it was easy to infer that he had discovered something of importance. Without delaying to put further questions, the scout made after him as he glided off into the night.

CHAPTER V.

THE MEDICINE BAG.

The course taken by Little Cayuse carried him and the scout farther toward the edge of town and well to the right of the main street. Here there was a small swale, the bottom of which was covered with brush. Cayuse crawled over the bank of the swale and descended into a clump of white thorn.

"What have you got here, Cayuse?" asked the scout.

"Pa-e-has-ka wait," answered the boy; "me make um light."

A dead *cholla* cactus, half of it dry as powder, grew part way up the bank of the swale. Cayuse touched a match to the cactus and it blazed up with a brightness that illuminated the swale for half a dozen yards in every direction.

"You see, Pa-e-has-ka?" said Cayuse, pointing to the

chafed trunk of an ironwood tree that grew in the centre of the thicket. "*Tres caballos* all same hitched to ironwood. You savvy um, huh?"

The scout examined the tree and a little cleared space of ground at the foot of it.

"You're right, as usual, boy," he remarked. "Three horses were hitched here. There's a set of small moccasin prints and two sets of boot prints. That would indicate that one of the riders was an Indian, perhaps a half-breed, but certainly a woman. The other two were men. One of the men was an Indian or a half-breed, because the woman and one of the men mounted their horses from the right side. The other man mounted from the left, as a white man always mounts."

"Wuh!" exclaimed Little Cayuse, with an admiring look at the scout.

Buffalo Bill's trained eye had discovered the truth as quickly as the little Piute had discovered it.

"Look there, boy," continued the scout, pointing to the side of the tree against which the light of the burning *cholla* was beating most brightly. "There is a smear of blood on the ironwood. A wounded man left that, either with his hand or by leaning against the tree when he untied his horse. One of the escaped prisoners was wounded, Cayuse."

"Ai," nodded the boy. "One half-breed and one white man make um tracks from here. But how you call um *moharrie*?"

"The woman, Cayuse, is a half-breed who claims to be the sister of Black Salvadore. She smuggled a bomb, a file, and a steel saw into the jail, and the prisoners used them for getting rid of their manacles and blowing their way to freedom. The woman calls herself Cactus Blossom."

In order to avail himself of the light, while it lasted, the scout at once began tracing the course taken by the fugitives.

"They went south and west," he remarked. "Cactus Blossom had the horses here, and was waiting for Salvadore and Ponca Dave. As soon as they came, the horses were untied and the prisoners fled toward the desert. There's no use trying to follow their trail to-night. That's a daylight proceeding, and——"

He stopped abruptly.

"You find um something else, Pa-e-has-ka?" asked Cayuse.

The scout had discovered something else. Just at the edge of the rim of firelight he picked up the tracks of a fourth horse.

"There was some one else waiting for Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore, Cayuse—another rider who did not go as close to the hitched horses as Cactus Blossom did. The man did not dismount, but waited here. When the others came along, he joined them. It was an unshod horse he rode, so probably an Indian cayuse. The man may have been one of the redskin followers of Ponca Dave."

"Wuh!" exclaimed Cayuse. "You got um right, Pa-e-has-ka."

The scout went a little way beyond the circle of light; then, as he was on the point of turning back, his foot struck against some object on the ground—an object that was soft under his boot sole.

He bent quickly and touched the object with his hand. His fingers encountered soft fur, smooth as velvet. Wondering what his find could be, the scout picked it up and

turned to Cayuse.

"Touch a match to another *cholla*, my lad," said he. "I've found something which we must investigate."

Cayuse located another cactus, fired it, and the scout drew close and held up the object for a critical survey.

"Ugh!" grunted Cayuse. "Him Injun medicine bag."

The little Piute was correct. The Indian who had been waiting, and had formed the fourth member of the party, had lost something that was nearer and dearer to him than life itself, viz.: his "medicine."

The pouch had been skillfully contrived from the whole skin of a beaver, intact with head, claws and teeth. Between the two forepaws was a laced slit.

"We find um Injun raider's 'medicine,'" exulted Cayuse, knowing what that would mean to the unfortunate owner of the pouch. "Whoosh! Injun heap sorry him lost 'medicine.' Him feel all same squaw."

As the boy spoke and exulted, his hand wandered to his girdle and fondly patted his own medicine bag. Once, many moons before, Little Cayuse had lost his own "medicine," and he was a badly demoralized Piute until it was found and restored to him.

The scout untied the thong that laced the slit, spread the two edges apart and thrust in his hand.

The first thing he drew out—and there was nothing in the bag but—as supposed to have magical properties—was a dried scalp. The hair of the scalp was red, a color which must have given it its occult powers.

Next there was developed a piece of pipestone from quarries twelve hundred miles distant, and guarded sacredly by the Pawnees. The stone had been rudely carved with figures of mystic omen.

The third object to be brought to light was a bundle of snake rattles; then a dried frog; and then, the very last, came a small buckskin-wrapped packet, whipped over with a cord of deer sinew.

"Ponca medicine heap fool medicine," derided Cayuse.

"Every redskin thinks there's no medicine like his own," laughed the scout.

Cayuse himself, in his own pouch, had a dried mustang hoof which he believed had the most potent virtues; but the powers of the mustang hoof were very real to him, and the red scalp, the dried frog, the bit of pipestone and the buckskin packet excited only his contempt.

The scout, laying the charms on the ground and dropping the beaverskin beside them, knelt to undo the deer sinew and examine the contents of the buckskin packet.

A square of white cloth, neatly folded, came out of the packet. When spread out, the cloth was seen to be marked curiously with some black pigment.

First, there was the tracing of a parallelogram, and through this roughly traced figure ran a curved mark, crossing the straight lines of the parallelogram and continuing to curve around clear to the edge of the cloth.

"Ugh!" muttered Cayuse, peering over the scout's shoulder. "Pa-e-has-ka talk with um medicine? Medicine talk to Pa-e-has-ka?"

"If there is any talking between me and this medicine," the scout smiled, "it's not the sort of talk I can understand. However, this looks as though it might have a value, and I'll just put it in my pocket."

He threw away the bit of buckskin in which the cloth had been wrapped. Cayuse, with a grunt, caught up the beaverskin pouch. The next moment, had the scout not

restrained him, he would have thrown it upon the blazing cactus.

"Not so fast, Cayuse," said the scout. "That bag may prove of value, too. Put the rest of the medicine back into it."

"Him heap bad luck," demurred Cayuse, "to keep another Injun's medicine."

"I'll shoulder the consequences, boy. Put the stuff back into the pouch and then give it to me."

Cayuse obeyed orders, but with none too much grace. Meanwhile the scout had filled his pipe. Lighting it, he hunched up his knees and peered reflectively into the smoke that shimmered around him in the glow of the burning cactus. The Piute, having finished restoring the medicine to the bag, drew the lacing taut and tied it, then dropped the bag at the scout's side. Sitting near, he relapsed into patient silence. Pa-e-has-ka was thinking, and the boy was awaiting the result.

"You went hunting for the escaped prisoners as soon as you left the hotel, Cayuse?" queried the scout.

"Ai," was the answer.

"And you discovered that place where the horses had been tied?"

"Ai."

"Well done. The little warrior, my Piute pard, has the eyes of an owl and can see in the dark."

Although it thrilled him, yet Cayuse was silent and somber under this praise of his beloved Pa-e-has-ka. Only his eyes glowed—glowed in the fire gleam like smoldering coals.

"Boy," the scout went on, "when we captured Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore, many of the red raiders belonging to the gang were left. They did not lose heart. Cactus Blossom came to them, and she told them what she would do to save her brother and Ponca Dave from the anger of the white men. Cactus Blossom plotted well."

"Squaws heap foolish sometimes," commented Cayuse sagely; "sometimes heap sharp."

"One of the red raiders has lost his medicine," went on the scout, "and it may help us to find the two leaders of the gang."

"How medicine help?" asked the wondering Cayuse.

"That's too deep for me, but I have a feeling that it will. Therefore, I shall keep——"

From the distance came a sharp report. Between the scout and the boy hissed a bullet, striking the burning cactus and flinging a shower of sparks and brands in all directions.

Quick as a flash both Buffalo Bill and Cayuse were on their feet and racing in the direction from which the bullet had come—the scout carrying the beaverskin.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERIOUS MARKSMAN.

Both the scout and the Indian boy were fairly sure about this mysterious marksman. Quite likely he was the owner of the lost medicine and had left the fugitives and returned in the forlorn hope of discovering his beaverskin pouch.

In the light of the blazing *cholla* he had seen Buffalo Bill and Little Cayuse. Perhaps he had seen them fingering his treasures, or perhaps he had only seen the bag

lying on the ground at the scout's side. Be that as it might, he had hazarded a shot. With so clear a target, looming against the background of a blazing cactus, the wonder was that his bullet had flown wide.

To catch the red raider would be a move in the right direction. In order to get back his lost medicine, he might be willing to offer some information regarding the whereabouts of Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore.

In losing his medicine, an Indian loses caste among his people; but, more than that, he suffers grievously in his own estimation. The warriors of his tribe look upon him with contempt, and make their contempt so sorely felt that their luckless comrade will take himself off and grieve in loneliness, wearing his raggedest blanket, painting his face black and daubing his hair with clay.

To recover lost medicine, and be once again a warrior among warriors, a redskin will go almost any length. Yes, most assuredly, that beaverskin pouch would be a fine thing to use in dickering with its original owner.

It was in the hope of capturing the Indian, therefore, that the scout and the Piute boy hastened away toward the point from which the bullet had been launched.

They had not gone far before the patter of retreating hoofs reached their ears.

"No use, boy," said the scout, drawing to a halt. "The red wouldn't wait—he's off like a streak. If we had our horses there might be a chance of overhauling him, but he's going a dozen feet to our one and it's folly to run after him."

"More *caballos* come," said Cayuse, waving a shadowy arm along the swale.

The scout could not see, but he heard the approaching hoofs. Presently a voice hailed:

"Hello, thar!"

"Hello!" answered the scout.

"Two horsemen drew close.

"If it ain't Buffer Bill!" exclaimed one of the men, leaning from his saddle and peering through the gloom.

"Who are you?" demanded the scout.

"I'm Stokes, an' this here's Painter," was the reply. "Oberlee sent us out ter beat up the kentry in hope o' findin' some sign o' them raiders. What was that shootin' we heerd?"

"One of the raiders was firing at us, Stokes," answered the scout, speaking quickly. "It's an Indian. He raced toward the southwest. Follow him—capture him if you can, for he can help us locate Ponca Dave and Salvadore."

Stokes and Painter, realizing the necessity of haste, did not pause for more questioning. The first chance of the night to accomplish something had come their way. With a rattle of spurs, they headed toward the southwest and had soon vanished among the shadows.

"We can do no more to-night, Cayuse," said the scout. "Let's go back to the jail."

Together they turned on their course, recrossed the swale and came to the adobe lock-up. The crowd had thinned about the jail. Presidio and two other men were on guard at the break in the wall, and Dick Oberlee and Mortimer Degard were smoking pipes and exchanging notes in the office.

"Got a clue?" inquired the cattleman, as the scout and the Piute boy walked in on them.

"A clue, yes," answered the scout, "but not much of a one, at that."

He handed the beaverskin to Degard.

"Pah!" exclaimed Degard, "an Injun medicine bag."
 "What's inside?" inquired Oberlee, catching the bag out of the cattleman's hands.

The scout recited the list of charms gravely.

"Ugh!" grunted Degard. "How do you make a clue out of that?"

Then the scout told of the bullet launched by the mysterious marksman, and of his sending Stokes and Painter away on the man's trail.

"Now you're getting down to cases!" exclaimed Degard. "The man who shot at you was the owner of the lost bag. If Stokes and Painter overhaul him and bring him in, we may be able to find out something worth while."

"That's what I'm hoping for," said the scout, "but if Stokes and Painter don't have any success, we have this to fall back on."

With that he laid the cloth diagram out on the table in front of the sheriff and the cattleman.

"That's a map, eh?" inquired Oberlee.

"Looks like it," said the scout.

"Map of what?" asked Degard.

"That's hard to tell."

"Don't pin any faith in that scrap of cloth," said the cattleman. "An Injun's liable to pick up anything and stuff it in his medicine bag."

"I have a feeling that this is valuable."

"In what way?"

"The presentiment doesn't go into details, Degard. It's just a notion that's taken hold of me."

"Won't bank too heavily on it, Buffalo Bill," urged Degard. "I'm playing Stokes and Painter to bring us in our first real tip."

"If they succeed, Oberlee," said the scout, folding up the cloth diagram and putting it in his pocket and possessing himself of the medicine bag, "get word to me at the hotel. I'm going there and sleep out the rest of the night. We're liable to have busy times to-morrow."

"You'll take the trail after Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore?" asked Degard anxiously.

"We'll try to pick up the trail," was the scout's answer; "and, if we do, you may be sure we'll run it out."

"When do you start?"

"Directly after breakfast. Pawnee Bill went to a fandango, over toward Adobe Walls. He'll ride with us, and he ought to be back before we're ready to start. I hope he'll get back in time to rest up a little."

"You don't mean to say," cried Degard, "that he went alone to that *baile* of Sebastian's?"

"He did," answered the scout. "Pawnee Bill isn't afraid to go alone anywhere. What of it?"

"Sebastian is a greaser, and plumb lawless. Men of his own stripe flock to his *bailes*. Pulque flows free, and it's as much as an American's life is worth to show himself at one of the fandangos. But Pawnee Bill knows how to look out for number one, I reckon."

"None better," said the scout, as he and Cayuse left the jail.

Nevertheless, what the cattleman had said about Sebastian and his *bailes* had jarred the scout unpleasantly. Only Buffalo Bill's confidence in the prince of the bowie's tact and courage kept him from taking horse forthwith and riding toward Sebastian's.

It was after three o'clock in the morning when the scout got back into bed. None of his other pards had returned to the hotel.

He slept an hour and was aroused by Stokes. He did not open the door, for Stokes reported from the hall that the mysterious marksman had not been overhauled.

"That's hard luck," said the scout.

"Degard an' Oberlee seem ter think so," answered Stokes.

"Did you hear or see anything of the Indian?"

"Seein' was out o' the question, Buffler Bill, bekase o' the dark. We used our ears, but it didn't do no good. Mebbe we was on the wrong track."

"You must have been, or else your horses weren't fleet enough. Tell Degard not to lose hope. Something is liable to happen to-morrow."

Stokes went away and the scout went to sleep again. Half an hour later he was aroused by another rap on his door.

"Who's there?" the scout demanded.

"Me," came the voice of the old trapper.

"Did you discover anything, Nick?"

"Not so ye could notice. Didn't reckon we could, goin' by guess an' by gosh like we was."

"Is the baron with you?"

"He's puttin' up the saddle stock."

"Pawnee back yet?"

"Nary."

"Well, pard, go to bed and sleep until you're called. We're going to hit the trail in the morning."

"Hoop-a-la!" said Nomad, and tramped away.

It was the tin trumpet, blowing for breakfast, that pulled the scout out of his dreams for the last time. Bounding from his blankets, he took a look out of the window of his room.

The sun was just rising.

"Now," he thought, as he began dressing, "if Pawnee Bill isn't back, I'll know he landed on some sort of a reef at Sebastian's. In that event," and the scout's brow clouded, "I'll have two matters to attend to—locating Pard Pawnee and running down the escaped raiders—and neither one will admit of much delay. As between the two, though, it will be Pawnee that claims my first attention."

Hoping for the best, he left his room and descended to the office. Cayuse was already down, and Nomad and the baron were getting into their clothes.

"Has Pawnee come, Cayuse?" asked the scout.

"Nah, Pa-e-has-ka," answered the boy. "Pawnee him not in hotel, and Chick-Chick him not in corral."

A host of disagreeable possibilities flashed through the mind of the king of scouts, but the one that struck him hardest was this:

Had Pawnee Bill fallen into some trap laid by the red raiders? Cactus Blossom had proved herself a clever hand at planning, and could it be that she was back of the invitation and the veiled threat that had drawn the prince of the bowie to Sebastian's?

This was a momentous—perhaps a vital—possibility, and the scout's worry grew apace as he turned it over in his mind.

CHAPTER VII.

LONE DOG.

Often, in following one trail in life, we cross another which offers possibilities we did not expect. Thus it was with the scout and his pards when they left Poverty Flat immediately after a hurried breakfast.

To the great dismay of Oberlee and Mortimer Degard, the scout did not proceed to the swale and lay a south-westerly course in the direction taken by the escaped raiders; but, instead of this, Buffalo Bill, Nomad, the baron, and Little Cayuse galloped off along the trail to Adobe Walls.

"Ain't you going after Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore?" inquired the cattleman.

"Later," said the scout. "We've something else to attend to first."

"But the longer you wait, Buffalo Bill, the farther away the raiders are getting."

"That may all be, Degard, but Pard Pawnee may have struck a snag at Sebastian's *baile*, and been given a dance not on the program. We're going to look in at Sebastian's."

"Then," spoke up Oberlee, "I reckon I'll hike after the raiders with a posse."

"A good idea, Oberlee," said the scout, "and I wish you luck. A pard is first with me, always."

With that, the scout struck out along the trail to Adobe Walls.

"Mebbeso," remarked the old trapper, after an hour of silence and steady jogging, "this hyar Cactus Blossom *moharrie* had somethin' ter do with thet ace o' clubs thet was slipped under Pawnee's door yesterday mornin'."

"She might have put it there, Nick," returned the scout, "although who wrote the card and gave her the cue are matters of mystery. So far as I can find out, there was only one turkey in all Poverty Flat—and that's the one Jeff Holloway was saving for our Sunday dinner. Now, it was a roast turkey that Cactus Blossom tried three times to take into the jail and deliver to Salvadore; and it was that same roast turkey which the Ladies' Aid Society finally delivered for Cactus Blossom. The question is, was Cactus Blossom's turkey the same bird Jeff Holloway had in his chicken coop, and lost mysteriously?"

"I bed you somet'ing for nodding it vas!" chirped the baron.

"Waugh!" agreed Nomad, "ther baron's bean is on ther right number. Cactus Blossom got the turkey, roasted et and stuffed et with thet hardware an' powder, dressin'. Thar ain't no doubt o' thet, an' I'll gamble my last soo on et."

"If that is true, it means that Cactus Blossom was at the hotel," remarked the scout. "She may have stolen the turkey at the time she passed the playing card under the bottom of Pawnee Bill's door."

"She done et!" asserted the old trapper. "Didn't Jim Presidio an' me find turkey feathers in thet deserted shack whar ther half-breed gal was a-stayin'?"

"Then," continued the scout, "a large field of possibilities is opened up. Cactus Blossom has identified herself with the raiders; therefore, in shoving that invitation to the *baile* under Pard Pawnee's door, she may have been acting for some of the red gang who are still at large. If we take all this for granted, then the game was not only to secure the rescue of Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore, but also the capture of Pawnee Bill, at the same time."

"An' this greaser, Sebastian, is helpin' the gal an' the raiders?"

"From all I can hear of Sebastian, Nick, I'd not put a play of that sort past him."

"Py shinks," piped the baron, "you fellers iss figurin' der t'ing oudt pedder as I can tell. Der more vat you

talk, der gloser vat ve get to der truf'. Dot durkey clue iss der finest vat ve efer shtruck, yah, so helup me."

"Some one at Sebastian's," proceeded the scout, "went about the work of luring Pawnee Bill into a trap in a mighty clever way. A dare was flaunted in our pard's face, and he'd throw himself at a hundred greasers before he'd take a dare."

"*Ach, du lieber!*" mourned the baron, "I vish dot Pawnee had let Nomat und me go along mit him."

Before the talk could proceed any farther the distant whinny of a horse reached the ears of the pards. Their own mounts pricked up their ears.

The scout drew rein, and the others followed suit.

The party of riders were close to a place around which clustered memories of an old clash with the raiders. The mouth of a ravine opened close to the trail. Chaparral clothed the bottom of the ravine, and the familiarity of the place struck each member of the party suddenly and with considerable force.

A little way up the defile, Little Cayuse had once camped for several days with two Apache trailers who were eager to join Ponca Dave's gang; and still farther up the ravine, Black Salvadore had pitched his camp and held captive Mortimer Degard. All the pards had had exciting experiences in that ravine, and the whinny of the horse, floating out of it, was well calculated to give them pause.

"What d'ye reckon thet means?" demanded Old Nomad.

"It means dere iss a horse in der rafine," expounded the baron; "und oof dere iss a horse dere, den dere iss a riter mit der animal. Und der shance iss goot, bards, dot der riter iss a raiter—for dis looks like der blace vere you said der raiters hang oudt mit demselufs."

"If we could find a raider any place, Nomad," said the scout, "I'd be inclined to look here. We'll delay our journey to Sebastian's long enough to have a look for that horse and his owner."

"Kerect, Buffler!"

The scout led the way through the undergrowth and into the defile. The moment the thickest of the brush was passed, he set Bear Paw to the gallop, and the whole party went thumping and thrashing along the serpentine windings of the ravine.

The scout drew rein abruptly. A hobbled Indian cayuse—presumably the animal that had given the alarm—broke upon his eyes. Within fifty feet of the cayuse was an overhang of rock.

This overhang was the very spot where Cayuse had spent several exciting days in camp with the Apaches. The boy knew the spot well.

Passive and stoical, an Indian was squatted under the lip of the overhang. His muzzle-loading rifle, powder-horn, and bullet pouch lay in a heap at his side.

A ragged blanket covered the redskin's shoulders and was drawn up closely under his chin. His face was blackened, and ooze from the margin of the small stream that flowed down the ravine was plastered in his hair.

The Indian's head was bent, and he neither moved nor lifted his eyes as the pards halted and surveyed him.

"Waal, thunder an' kerry one!" gulped the old trapper. "Ther pizen red looks as though he had been drummed out o' the tribe, an' was waitin' hyar ter starve hisself ter death. He ain't hosstyle any, an' mebbeso he's hopin' we'll put a bullet inter him an' ease his mis'ry."

Little Cayuse's eyes glimmered as he looked at the scout.

"Pa-e-has-ka," said the Piute, "mebbeso him Injun that lose medicine, huh? Mebbeso him raider, and come to hide himself in old raider place."

The notion was startling. For a moment, it seemed so far-fetched that the scout would not give it serious consideration. Then slowly the probability of an interplay of coincidences grew upon the scout with all the force of supreme conviction.

Had he and his pards tried to follow the tracks of the mysterious marksman of the preceding night, they would undoubtedly have failed to locate him; but, thinking not at all of the Indian who had lost his medicine, they had started for Sebastian's to hunt for Pawnee Bill and had been drawn into the ravine and directly to the redskin who, it seemed almost certain, had lost the beaverskin bag.

This Indian gave mute testimony, in every way, of being the man who had lost his medicine. He was passively dejected, and did not care a rap what happened to him.

Filled with wonder at the weird trend of events, Buffalo Bill motioned his pards to silence, handed his reins to Nomad and got down from his horse. Stepping close to the Indian, the scout stood looking down at him.

The redskin never lifted his eyes, nor shifted his position by an inch. He kept his head bowed, and allowed his squalor and his misery to impress the white men to their fullest extent.

"What sorrow has come to my brother?" asked the scout.

The Indian grunted, but made no further reply.

"Does my red brother wish to go over the One-way Trail?" went on the scout. "Has he lost his medicine, and can he no longer stand among the warriors of his tribe?"

There was another grunt which may have meant "yes" or "no" or nothing at all.

"If my brother will let Pa-e-has-ka be his friend," continued the scout patiently, "then the medicine that is lost may be returned."

This struck a spark from the Indian's intelligence, and he slowly raised his head.

"Pa-e-has-ka give um Lone Dog his lost medicine?" asked the redskin.

"Will Lone Dog talk with Pa-e-has-ka about Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore?" hedged the scout.

The Indian was silent for a space, evidently considering the proposition.

"Mebbeso Lone Dog talk," said he finally, "then Pa-e-has-ka give um back Lone Dog's medicine?"

"Ai."

Lone Dog began to show a growing interest in life.

"Pa-e-has-ka got um Lone Dog's medicine?" he inquired cautiously.

The scout returned to his horse and took the medicine pouch from his war bag. He showed the beaverskin to Lone Dog, and the redskin's eyes lighted with hope.

"Let Pa-e-has-a make um talk," said he, throwing back his blanket. "All same Lone Dog make um talk, too."

"Check!" chuckled the old trapper. "Tally one fer Cody luck an' the lost medicine. Did anybody ever hyer anythin' ter beat et?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PARDS SEPARATE.

Through good fortune, the scout was able to bring to bear on Lone Dog about the only argument that could have been at all effective.

Seemingly confident that his lost medicine was as good as recovered, Lone Dog went down to the water and washed the black from his face and the mud from his hair. The old blanket he kicked up under the overhang, then strung his powderhorn and bullet pouch over his shoulders, picked up his muzzle-loader and was ready for action.

His first move was to roll a cigarette, then to blow a whiff of smoke toward the sky, another toward the earth, and a third in the direction of the sun.

The scout had his brier going and also blew the three ceremonial whiffs.

"Make um palaver, Pa-e-has-ka," said Lone Dog.

"The Ponca brave," said the scout, "is far from the country of his people."

"The Ponca is part Comanche. Him go with 'Pache Comanche, Kiowa—all same any Injun where war trail is red."

"You are one of Ponca Dave's raiders?"

"Ai."

"You were waiting in the chaparral, last night, while Cactus Blossom helped Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore to escape from the jail?"

"Ai."

"Who is Cactus Blossom?"

"Him sister Salvadore."

"Where is her lodge?"

"Him lodge at Greaser Sebastian's."

"Er-waugh!" struck in old Nomad, following intently all that was said. "Even ther talk trail p'int's us fer Sebastian's."

Lone Dog answered the scout's questions with stoical indifference as to his legal responsibilities. His eye was single to the purpose of recovering the beaverskin bag, and he was ready to go any length in getting it back.

"Cactus Blossom lives at Greaser Sebastian's?" went on the scout, keen for this new line of inquiry.

"Ai. Sebastian's squaw him aunt to Cactus Blossom and Salvadore."

"Dot's der reason, I bed you, dot Sebastian helups der breeds," chimed in the baron.

"Greaser Sebastian helped Cactus Blossom in her plan to release Ponca Dave and Salvadore?"

"Ai, Greaser Sebastian and the *mujercita*."

"*Mujercita*?"

"All same Lola, Greaser Sebastian's girl."

"You *sabe* whether Lola wrote the paper talk for Cactus Blossom to take to Pawnee Bill?"

"No *sabe*."

"You no *sabe* Pawnee Bill go to the *baile* at Greaser Sebastian's?"

Lone Dog shook his head. It seemed clear that he was in the dark as to the plans involving Pawnee Bill.

"Was Salvadore hurt when he and Ponca Dave blew their way out of the jail?" proceeded the scout, taking another tack.

"Ponca Dave hurt," said the Indian.

"How?"

Lone Dog pushed a hand against his left side and swayed as he squatted on the ground.

"Heap bad," said he; "no *sabe* how."

"He could ride his horse?"

"Ai."

"Where have Ponca Dave, Salvadore and Cactus Blossom gone?"

Lone Dog waved his hand southward.

"All same Ponca Dave's medicine lodge," he answered.

This "medicine lodge" of the leader of the raiders had cut a large figure in Ponca Dave's affairs during the time he was a free agent and able to work his lawless will. It was said to be a house of mystery—but just what the "mystery" consisted of neither the scout nor his pards had ever been able to discover.

There were those who said that the "medicine lodge" was a fabrication, and that it had no existence in fact. Others were agreed that the place was a secret rendezvous, with the way to it so carefully hidden that even an Indian had to go over the course twice before he could cover it unaided.

If Ponca Dave really had such a hangout, it seemed quite natural to the scout that he should make for it at a time when he was wounded and in need of a safe haven.

"Does Lone Dog *sabe* the trail to the 'medicine lodge'?" asked the scout.

The Indian nodded.

"Will Lone Dog take Pa-e-has-ka there?"

A startled look crossed Lone Dog's face.

"Pa-e-has-ka heap big brave; all same, Pa-e-has-ka go to medicine lodge him never come out alive."

The scout laughed. At that, Lone Dog's earnestness increased.

"Medicine lodge," he insisted, "*muy malo* for Ponca Dave's enemies. Pa-e-has-ka him no friend Ponca Dave. Ponca Dave like um Pa-e-has-ka's hair. Ugh!"

"Look you, Lone Dog," said the scout sharply. "I've got your lost medicine. You shot at me in the dark, trying to get it back, and——"

"Heap big medicine," broke in Lone Dog. "Pa-e-has-ka no stop um bullet while he got Lone Dog's medicine."

"Well, whether because of the medicine or not, your bullet missed me. Now, if you want the medicine you'll have to show me the way to this medicine lodge. When you bring me in front of it, you can have your beaver-skin."

"Ai," muttered Lone Dog. "Me show Pa-e-has-ka the medicine lodge."

The scout got up and stepped toward his pards, taking the medicine bag with him.

"We'll have to separate, compadres," said he.

"Waugh!" grunted the old trapper, "blamed ef I like ther idee, Buffler. Fer why hev we got ter separate?"

"Why, Nick, because we're at a place where the trail forks—and we've got to see what's along each fork without any delay."

"I don't rise ter ye yit."

"It's like this: Cactus Blossom's plans included Pawnee Bill, last night. There seems to be little doubt on that score. Helped by Sebastian, I take it, the half-breed girl has brought about the escape of Ponca Dave and Salvadore, and has thrown trouble Pawnee Bill's way. A chance offers for two of us to get to Ponca Dave's house of mystery. If we don't take Lone Dog at his word immediately, the chance may never come again. And you can see, Nomad, that not an hour is to be lost in doing what we can to find out what's happened to Pawnee."

"I reckon ye're right, as per us'al, Buffler," admitted the trapper. "Et's yore plan fer two o' us ter go with Lone Dog, and fer t'other two ter keep on ter Greaser Sebastian's?"

"Yes."

"Which two follers Lone Dog?"

"Cayuse and I will run out that trail."

"Leavin' ther baron an' me ter make front on ther greaser hangout an' see ef Pawnee is thar?"

"That's it."

"Waal, ye're ther cap'n, Buffler. Whatever ye says goes with yore pards."

"There's no use for me to tell you, Nick," said the scout, "that you and the baron have got to keep your eyes skinned for treachery and several other kinds of trouble. I imagine, from what I have heard of it, that Sebastian's place is a nest of lawlessness."

"I reckon," returned the trapper grimly, "thet ther baron an' me'll hev plain an' easy sailin' at Sebastian's, compared ter what ye'll hev at thet medicine lodge o' Ponca Dave's. What aire we ter do arter we look inter matters at Sebastian's?"

"Whatever comes handiest. If you discover nothing, and find that Pawnee is all right and was merely delayed in getting back to Poverty Flat, why, go back to the Flat yourselves and wait there."

"Leavin' you an' Cayuse ter git tangled up with them red raiders at this house o' mystery, eh?" said Nomad discontentedly. "Me no like um, Buffler. You an' Cayuse aire corralin' ther hot end o' this, an' not leavin' ther baron an' me no chanst ter help ye."

"There's no other way for it."

"Kain't we come on ter this medicine lodge from Sebastian's?"

"You could, if you knew the way; but you don't. What's more, Lone Dog wouldn't be able to help you, for he'd be guiding Cayuse and me."

"Thet's ther propersition, all right, an' we kain't dodge et. I've heerd tell thet this medicine lodge o' Ponca Dave is a good many marches ter the south."

"It can't be."

"Fer why not?"

"Because Ponca Dave was badly wounded when he got away from the jail. In spite of that, he headed for his medicine lodge. He wouldn't have started for the lodge unless he'd known he was able to reach it; and he couldn't have reached it if it was more than a short march to the south."

"I reckon ye kin tally ag'in. Ef ther baron an' me kin pry out er way fer gittin' ter thet medicine lodge from Sebastian's, we're a-goin' ter come."

"All right—if you can."

The scout turned back toward Lone Dog, after slipping the beaverskin into his war bag.

"Get on your cayuse, Lone Dog," the scout called. "We're off for the house of mystery."

The Indian bounded erect, hurried to his pony and removed the hobbles, then mounted. Whirling the animal to an about-face, he started for the mouth of the ravine.

When the party had regained the trail, the trapper and the baron faced toward Adobe Walls and Sebastian's, while the scout and the little Piute shacked along in the wake of Lone Dog.

"Adios and good luck, Buffler!" whooped the trapper.

"Same to you, old pard!" answered the scout.

CHAPTER IX.

LOLA, THE SIREN.

A Mexican is a sleepy, quiet-loving person until you flaunt a feast or a *baile* in front of his eyes. Thereupon he awakes to mad activity. He will travel miles to eat his fill or dance the leather off his feet.

Pawnee Bill, just as he had intended, made an easy ride across the desert. The sun was down and the night advanced when he hove in sight of the adobe inhabited by Greaser Sebastian and his tribe. But the prince of the bowie did not regret the lateness of his arrival. A *baile's* fun is not at its best until night waxes toward the waning point.

The adobe was a sprawling black shadow against the lighter background of the desert. Being only one story in height, Sebastian's *casa* had to cover a good deal of ground in order to afford the necessary area for the owner and his tribe.

Poor Mexicans gravitate by a special law toward the home of a rich and influential relative. Usually they eat the rich relative out of house and home, and again gravitate toward some other of their kin who has had a wind-fall. But to eat Sebastian out of house and home seemed an impossibility. He had always beef for the mere killing and frijoles for the cooking, and even pulque for the drinking. This had been so for years and years and, *gracia a Dios*, the poor of Sebastian's blood hoped it would ever remain so.

A well in the desert furnished Sebastian with water, and this water made an oasis of some five acres of sand. There were a few cottonwoods on the oasis, and the irrigated land was planted to beans, and peppers, and corn.

As Pawnee Bill rode down a gentle slope that gave him a view of the rancho, a murmur of gay voices struck on his ears, picked out with gayer music of guitar and violin. Light flashed through narrow windows, and he saw saddle horses dozing at hitching poles. Leather-lined ox carts were grouped in another place.

The prince of the bowie's keen eye, running over horses and carts, proved to him that this *baile* was well attended.

"And they're enemies!" muttered Pawnee Bill, turning Chick-Chick toward a cottonwood well away from the hitching poles and the banked ox carts. "Shades of Unkte-hee, I wonder why? Have I ever crossed Sebastian's trail? Is he some one I know, who has run up a score against me? Well," and he laughed a little as he swung down from his saddle, "'on with the dance—let joy be unconfined.' I'll soon know what there is to this. Meanwhile, Chick-Chick," he added, buckling the reins around the cottonwood, "be ready to show four of the swiftest hoofs in these parts if I come for you suddenly."

He gave the buckskin a slap as he turned and made his way fearlessly toward the house.

The house, like most Mexican dwellings, was built around an open square, or patio. A wide entrance led through the front part of the building and into the patio. In that square space, open to the sky and flanked with the living quarters of the Mexican's household, were stored the carts and harness, the meager farming tools, the bridles and the saddles belonging to the *rancho*.

As Pawnee Bill jingled his resplendent way into the lighted entrance, a Mexican appeared suddenly before him.

"*Que' puiere?*"

"What do I want? Why, my share of the festivities, amigo. Who am I? Pawnee Bill, right bower of the king of scouts, no one else. What's more, I'm here by special bid. Inform his greaser nibs that Pawnee Bill is waiting at the gate. *Pronto, pronto!* That music has been tickling my heels ever since I first began to hear it."

The Mexican vanished to announce the Americano. The prince of the bowie, while he waited, hummed the air called *La Golondrina* and stepped a dance around the entrance. He almost hopped into a small, weasel-faced Mexican, of uncertain age, who abruptly presented himself at a door.

"Señor Pawnee Bill?" grinned the Mexican.

The smile showed his teeth and was more like a snarl, and in his beady eyes came a glitter of triumph.

"Why, yes," replied the prince of the bowie. "Didn't the other greaser make that plain to you?"

"Si."

"You're Sebastian, eh?"

"I am Pedro Sebastian, yes."

"*Boshu nechee?*" Mighty kind of you, Sebastian, to give me a bid to your doings. But why has the music stopped?"

"My friends wait; the dance is stayed in Señor Pawnee Bill's honor." Sebastian bowed with a flourish, showing the ivory handles of two revolvers at the back of his belt. "Will you come?"

"Sure I'll come, but don't fool yourself by thinking I'm a fly in the spider's parlor. Maybe you've heard that I can throw a knife, or a rope with some precision, and my bullets don't go far wide of the targets they're aimed at. Also, Sebastian, I have eyes in the back of my head, and my 'medicine' talks to me. I Told You So is a prophet in every tribe but Pawnee Bill's."

Some of this, if not all, was absorbed by Sebastian. Once more he showed his teeth in a guileful grin and backed through the door, beckoning with his finger.

Wrought steel rowels and silver hawk's bells tinkled their music as the prince of the bowie strode after Sebastian. They came presently into the great *sala*, whose ground space measured fifty by forty feet, brightly lighted by kerosene lamps. Benches flanked the walls, and on them sat Mexicans, Mexicanas and *niños*, all silent and staring at the newcomer.

On a raised platform at the farther end of the room were four Mexicans, two with guitars and two with violins. Scattered over the floor, just where the music had left them, were the dancers.

Pawnee Bill swept his eyes around him. In every eye, even in those of the *niños*, he read hate.

Why was this, he asked himself. Never had he seen Sebastian before, nor any of Sebastian's Mexican guests. He was the only Americano at the *baile*, and perhaps, if the worst came, there would be forty swarthy-skinned men against him. He met the ominous looks with a smile, and the fair ones could not avoid showing their admiration. There was not a *caballero* in all that crowded *sala* with the face and figure of this dashing Americano. The man in brown appealed to the ladies if not to the men.

Sebastian lifted his hand and spoke a few words of introduction. His talk was Spanish, but not much of it escaped Pawnee Bill. The Americano was Pawnee Bill, pard of the great scout; Pawnee Bill was a guest, and Sebastian hoped his friends would remember that Pawnee Bill had helped Buffalo Bill in the war against Ponca Dave and the raiders. Let them, Sebastian urged, treat Pawnee Bill according to his deserts.

That reference to the raiders offered the prince of the bowie food for thought. Had the raiders anything to do with Sebastian? Had the capture of Ponca Dave and Black Salvatore anything to do with the invitation to the *baile*?

Before Pawnee Bill could arrive at any conclusion, the music struck up. But this was not in obedience to a signal from Sebastian. A girl had waved her hand to the musicians, at the same time speaking sharply so that she could be heard by all in the room.

Those who had been dancing melted away into the sidelines. The girl had the floor to herself. The music was a languorous Spanish dance, and the girl began floating through it, gliding forward and backward, and pausing to bend her lithe form gracefully.

The girl was beautiful. There was no denying that. Pawnee Bill admitted it to himself as he stood against the wall, watching her float back and across and up and down the big room.

She was looking for her cavalier. Eagerly the young Mexicans watched her approach, and then disappointedly saw her whirl past them.

Slowly, with liquid eyes sparkling and the light striking dusky gleams from her black hair, she came nearer and nearer the man in brown.

"She'll get a partner, all right," thought the prince of the bowie, "if she comes within hailing distance of me."

"Dance with Lola, and the Americano dies! I, Gonzales, have said it!"

The keen words bored their way into Pawnee Bill's ear, and he turned slowly. A young *rico* in gray and green was at his elbow, and there was a threat in his eyes as well as in his voice.

"Lola," muttered the prince of the bowie. "So that is what she is called, eh?"

"Lola Sebastian, daughter of Pedro," went on the *rico*. "She is to be mine!"

"Scoot-a-wah-boo!" laughed the man in brown.

At that moment, Lola had snatched a handkerchief from her bosom and dropped it at Pawnee Bill's feet. Gonzales reached for it, but he was a shade too late. The bit of cambric was already in the hands of the man in brown. The lust to kill shot through Gonzales' swarthy face and his hand fell to his knife.

Sebastian seized his arm and whispered to him. Gonzales nodded savagely, dropped his hand from the knife and leaned wrathfully against the wall.

Pawnee Bill with a grace and ease that seemed marvelous to the Mexicans, danced out across the floor, the handkerchief in his hand and the hawk's bells jingling what might have been a requiem. For Lola—and well he knew it—was a siren, enraging the Mexicans, and especially Gonzales, against him. If not a siren, then she was a coquette eager for conquest. But such a dare Pawnee Bill would not take.

From her lustrous hair, Lola pulled a red rose and flung it at the Americano. The man in brown deftly snatched it from the air and thrust its stem through his buttonhole. Gonzales, heaving a Spanish oath, again let

his hand flutter around his knife hilt. And again the wily Sebastian soothed him.

The languorous Spanish dance was followed through to its end, and the end came when Pawnee Bill, going down on one knee, caught the *señorita's* hand and pretended to press it to his lips. The slim fingers of the *señorita* closed around the palm of the man in brown, lifted him erect, drew his hand through her arm and then, together, they passed through a door leading out of the *sala*.

There came a roar of rage from the Mexicans, followed by a rush, led by Gonzales, toward the door through which the Americano and the Mexicana had passed.

But Sebastian stemmed the tide and blocked the pursuit. He spoke quickly and sharply, and anger gave way to complaisance, while a mocking laugh went the rounds of the big room.

The coil was tightening around the Americano.

CHAPTER X.

GETTING A LINE ON SEBASTIAN.

Conscience holds no despotic sway over the ordinary Mexicana. Fancy and caprice guide her, and there are those who will break a heart or wreck a life without a qualm.

Pawnee Bill knew all this, but he was seeking information. To get a line on Sebastian and uncover the cause of his hostility was the work the prince of the bowie was anxious to accomplish. He felt instinctively that Lola Sebastian had written that invitation around the ace of clubs, and what she knew of her father's plans, the man from No Man's Land wanted to know. So he went with her cheerfully, by no means ignorant of the hornets' nest he was leaving behind him, in the *sala*.

The girl did not speak. Lightly she held his hand in her arm, and by a devious course led him through the wide entrance and out of the house. They came presently to a small pool whose banks were fragrant with oleander trees. Here there was a bench. The girl seated herself, Pawnee Bill dropping down at her side in such a manner that he could keep watch behind him.

"The Americano is brave," said Lola, in rippling English that held the barest suggestion of a Spanish accent.

"*Gracias*," said the prince of the bowie grimly, "but less brave, perhaps, than foolhardy. You sent that invitation, *chiquita mia*?"

"Me, I sent it, yes. And you came."

"And found a crowd of strangers, with every *hombre* of them ready to bowie me. Why is that, *señorita*? What have I ever done to your father and your father's friends?"

"You are the *compadre* of Buffalo Bill, not so?"

"Aye, and that's my chief glory. Few men are picked

by the king of scouts for blanket mates. He's my *necarnis*, my best friend and sworn pard. What has Buffalo Bill done that you and your outfit go gunning for his *compadres*?"

"It is what he, and you, and the rest of your *compadres* have done."

"By the sacred O-zu-ha, but this gets deeper and darker. Be plain with me, *señorita*, I'm not here to be knifed or shot. If necessary, I can throw a bowie clear through your respected padre and then show the balance of his tribe how I wear my back hair. But I don't want to be violent."

The girl laughed a little. It was one of those dulcet, Mexicana laughs which have tinkled from the Rio Grande to Yucatan, between the Gulf and the Pacific, and aroused love or hate in the breasts of countless *caballeros*. But it aroused neither one nor the other in the breast of the prince of the bowie. He kept a cool head under any and all circumstances.

"Let me tell you," said Lola the siren. "My madre is a blood relative of Black Salvadore. Ponca Dave is my father's sworn friend, just as you are Buffalo Bill's. Do you *sabe, amigo mio*?"

"An-pe-tu-we!" exclaimed Pawnee Bill. "The light breaks. Your respected father is in a taking because Buffalo Bill and pards have helped the Cochise cattlemen and rounded up Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore. For that reason, I am asked to come here. Possibly, Sebastian would like to seize and hold me, ransoming the two raiders out of the jail in Poverty Flat? That game was tried once by Black Salvadore, with the result that Salvadore got into the yamen at the Flat, instead of getting Ponca Dave out of it. Tell Pedro Sebastian to be wise, and profit by the experience of Black Salvadore."

"That is not it, Americano," said the girl.

"Then what is it?"

"It is revenge the padre wants. He will not seize and hold you, but when he and his guests are ready they will strike—*strike to kill*."

"I'm obliged for your tip, *chiquita mia*," returned Pawnee Bill with his careless laugh. "They'll have to be quicker than chain lightning if they strike me first; and as for the killing part—well, let me assure you that your respected father has coppered the wrong bet. If you're in the plot, why are you telling me this?"

"Because, *amigo mio*, I have a plot of my own and I wish you to help me."

"Now, by Unk-te-hee, this whole business is getting more interesting. You helped get me into one plot in order that I might help you engineer another. *Buenos!* Tell me what wires you want to pull, *senorita*, and I'll reflect and let you know what I can do."

"You—you saw Gonzales?"

"That blear-eyed dago in gray and green? Yes, I saw him. We had a few words together."

"It is my padre's wish," murmured the girl, "that I give Gonzales my hand."

"Give it to him, *señorita*, but double it and let him feel the weight of your small knuckles. He is *muy malo*."

"*Caramba!*" flashed the girl, and stamped her foot. "Do I not know? It is not Gonzales, the hacendado, but Tadeo, the vaquero, I would marry. Yet my padre insists on Gonzales. What would you do, *señor*?"

"I'd do what I pleased and let my respected father go hang. In these affairs of the heart, *señorita*, the girl is the one that's to be suited."

The girl struck her small hands together ecstatically.

"Then you will help me?"

"How am I to help you?"

"Listen! My padre has no love for Tadeo. Tadeo is not at this *baile*, for if he came he would fight with the padre and with Gonzales. You can take me to Tadeo; it is a long ride, but you can take me."

Pawnee Bill was drifting into deeper waters than he had supposed were before him. He knew the girl was playing a part, and that her purpose boded no good to himself. Nevertheless, he was anxious to see the play through. Besides, in faring away with the girl on the track of the supposed Tadeo, he would be leaving behind him the house of Sebastian with all its perils.

"Where is this Tadeo, *señorita*?" inquired Pawnee Bill.

"A long ride to the south, *señor*," was the answer.

"Could I take that long ride to the south, deliver you into the hands of Tadeo and the priest, and then get back to Poverty Flat by daybreak? If not, then Buffalo Bill will come here hunting for me—and he might talk harshly to your respected father."

"You can take me to Tadeo," declared the girl, "and get back to the Flat by sunrise."

"*Buenos!* But how can the flight be managed without Sebastian heading us off at the start? He is watching me here, I take it, and perhaps his spies are even listening to our talk."

"We are not watched, *señor*, and there are no spies. My padre understands that I am to make myself agreeable, and he thinks he can keep you thus until the moment comes when he and his amigos will strike."

"And what is that particular moment?"

"Midnight—and in the patio."

"Shades of Unk-te-hee! Your father is real murderous. I wonder if he understands how dangerous for himself any move like that would be?"

"We must be quick," murmured the girl, "if we would succeed in getting away."

"I'm ready whenever you are. Where's your horse?"

"I will get the caballo. Go mount your own horse and wait for me in the trail."

Before Pawnee could say another word, the girl had sprung up and fluttered away from him through the lilacs.

The prince of the bowie stood erect and listened. The music of violins and guitars was pouring itself out through the open windows of the *casa*, and the melody drowned the rustling of the girl's dress and the light fall of her feet.

"Here's a fine show down!" muttered Pawnee Bill. "I come to face mysterious enemies at a *baile*, and I finish by playing Cupid. It's a rhinecaboo, of course, and I'm pretending to take the bait. But what will be the upshot? An ambush? The girl will be with me, so it's hardly that. Anyhow, with Chick-Chick under me, and bowie and six-shooters handily by, there's not a danger in the Southwest that can claim me for its own. We'll see, *chiquita mia!*"

He turned on his jingling heel and moved away to where Chick-Chick was waiting at the cottonwood. Mounting, he rode slowly toward the trail.

Meanwhile, Lola Sebastian had fluttered away toward the adobe stable. By the high horse corral at the stable's side she paused and trilled softly.

There came a low-spoken answer, and a man emerged from the shadows, leading a saddled and bridled horse.

"All is well, Gomez," said the girl. "Mount and ride at speed to the medicine lodge. Tell those who are there to be ready, and that I am coming with Pawnee Bill. Take the short cut over the mountain—you know it well, and there will be no danger. We will take the longer way 'round. That will bring you to the medicine lodge half an hour before we get there. Understand?"

"*Si, señorita,*" answered the man.

The girl talked glibly in her native tongue; and after she had finished, and had climbed into her saddle, she sat for a space watching Gomez disappear in the dark and then reappear on horseback and fade away in the darkness.

When the man was well on his way, the Mexican rode past the house.

"Is it well, *novia?*" whispered a voice from a lighted window.

"It is well, padre," answered the girl. "Gomez is on the way, and we are starting."

"Good!" muttered the voice.

The girl rode on. The music, which had lulled, again broke forth, accompanied by gay voices and a sound of shuffling feet. And the coil about Pawnee Bill tightened a little more!

CHAPTER XI.

THE MEDICINE LODGE.

Pawnee Bill was smoking and singing as he rode toward the south with Lola Sebastian. Had he known what that night was bringing forth in Poverty Flat, he would

certainly have thought twice before taking that leap in the dark. As Buffalo Bill, however, was to start out on one trail and shift to another, so Pawnee Bill was destined to encounter surprises of which, just then, he did not dream.

The girl seemed a past mistress in the art of double dealing. She played admirably her treacherous part. The prince of the bowie, knowing she had assumed a rôle, observed with something like admiration the clever way she covered every detail.

"Tell me something about this Tadeo," said he, breaking off from the song that eddied from his lips with the cigar smoke. "He's a lucky dog, señorita."

"Ah," murmured the girl modestly, "you flatter. Tadeo is a vaquero, but he is gathering a herd of his own. Some day he will be rich—richer than Gonzales—then my padre will be proud of him for a son-in-law."

"So Tadeo is gathering a herd of his own, is he?"

"Si, señor. A little trick with the branding iron changes an 'S' to a 'B'—and 'B'—is Tadeo's mark."

"Well, well!" exclaimed the prince of the bowie. "Your Tadeo is a rustler, I take it."

The girl laughed sibilantly.

"Si, señor," she answered calmly, "it is as you say. He rustles his cattle; and the harder he works, the more his herd grows."

"This is—er—refreshing. The Cochise cattlemen would be pleased to know how I am helping a rustler. Do you think it's right to get a herd together in that way, *chiquita*?"

"It is right, señor, for see, it is my padre's cattle my Tadeo takes. The 'S' brand he changes to his own 'B.'"

"And he takes only your father's cattle?"

"That is all, señor."

"And you think it is right?"

"Surely. My padre said to Tadeo: 'You cannot have Lola because you are poor. If you had many cattle then you might have her, but as it is she takes Gonzales.' So Tadeo begins to make himself rich with my padre's cattle. If he marries me, then what is my father's will come to me some day, and so to him. So Tadeo argues that he is merely taking his own."

Pawnee Bill enjoyed the ingenuous remarks of his companion.

"But if Gonzales had married you, señorita," said he, "then Tadeo would have been but a plain cattle thief."

"I never intended that Gonzales and I should marry. Before that, I would surely have killed myself; *si, madre mia*, I would have taken my life."

Several times the girl had looked behind, over the dark trail they had covered, and had bent her head as though listening.

"Why do you do that, señorita?" asked Pawnee Bill.

"We might be followed," she answered. "Would you fight for me if we were pursued by my padre and his friends?"

"Of course I'd fight."

"I knew, I knew," breathed the girl. "Buffalo Bill and his *caballeros* are like that—always friends of the weak."

Pawnee Bill knew that the girl was not expecting pursuit, but that she pretended to be expecting it in order to give corroborative detail to the rôle she was enacting.

"Two-tongue, they say among the Pawnees," remarked the prince of the bowie, "is everybody's enemy and nobody's friend."

"Why do you talk to me of this Two-tongue?"

The señorita turned in her saddle and bent her eyes on the prince of the bowie.

"The saying just came into my mind, that's all," answered Pawnee Bill.

"Do you think, señor, that I talk with a double tongue?"

"Why should I? It is your respected father I was thinking about. He invited me to his *baile* as a guest, and would have dealt with me as an enemy."

"That is his way when he wants revenge for a relative."

Without seeming to have it as a purpose, the prince of the bowie managed to keep close to the girl's side. He was expecting something to happen, and felt that to be within arm's reach of his companion might contribute to his safety.

They were skirting the base of a mountain, following no trail and weaving in and out among giant boulders. A dozen Mexicans could have hidden behind any one of the boulders, precipitating an attack upon Pawnee Bill with a suddenness that would have left him scant opportunity for a successful defense. He felt sure that there would be no attack if his proximity to his companion made it reasonably certain that she would be involved in it.

"Tadeo," said the girl, "has places in the rough country where he hides."

"I should think he'd have to have places like that," said Pawnee Bill, "if he wants to keep his herd growing and, at the same time, keep his scalp."

"We are riding to one of those secret places now," went on the señorita.

"How do you know Tadeo will be there?"

"Why, señor, because there are times when I steal away from the *rancho* at night and ride there to see my *novio*. He waits there every night so that we may meet."

"Then my work is done as soon as I escort you to this secret place?"

"It is done, señor, as soon as I am with Tadeo."

"How much farther have we to go?"

"Only around the spur, señor."

The contour of the mountain, shadowed blackly against the night sky, bore a grotesque resemblance to a camel lying down on the desert. There were two "humps" on the crest, with an opening between which looked as though it might have been a pass, through which a traveler could come from one side of the uplift to the other and avoid a tedious detour around the base.

Below the second "hump" a small spur ran out from the mountain's slope. It was this spur to which the girl had reference, in naming the location of Tadeo's hiding place.

"As near as I can figure it," observed Pawnee Bill, casting a critical look at the mountain's top, "we have come around this uplift from a point directly under that cleft in the crest. We could have saved time by climbing through the notch, couldn't we?"

"You know not what you speak, señor!" shuddered the girl. "It is a dangerous climb by day, and doubly so by night. Many have been killed by trying that short cut over the mountain."

They turned sharply to the left in order to follow the foot of the spur. As they rounded the point of the spur, Pawnee Bill saw the black shadow of a house within a hundred feet of him. It was a one-story house and about as cheerless a habitation as the prince of the bowie had ever seen.

"Is that the rustler's hangout, señorita?" he inquired.

"Sí, señor," was the answer.

"I wouldn't live there, if I were you, after I became Señora Tadeo. The place would be liable to get on your nerves."

"Wait!" whispered the girl, halting her horse. "I will call. As soon as Tadeo comes, I will thank you and you may go."

She lifted her voice and called musically for Tadeo. The only answer she received was a chorus of coyote cries from the mountain slope behind the house.

"It looks as though Tadeo wasn't at home," said Pawnee Bill.

"He must be there!" exclaimed the girl. "It may be, señor, that he is inside, but asleep. Will you go in for me and waken him?"

The prince of the bowie scented danger in the suggestion. He did not dismount but rode closer to the building, surveying it as closely as the darkness would permit.

It was built of adobe and had a door of heavy planks. He circled the walls and discovered that the place was without any windows.

Certainly a house without windows was a curious proposition.

"If Tadeo is asleep in there," called the scout, riding around the corner of the house and toward the door, "then it's a cinch he's smothered to death. I don't ad-

mire his judgment in selecting a place like this for a hangout."

He leaned from his saddle and drummed on the door with his knuckles. The hollow interior echoed the pounding thunderously.

There was no response to the summons.

"He must be there," cried the girl, "I am sure he is there."

She tossed the reins over her horse's head and slipped down from the saddle.

"Going in, señorita?" inquired Pawnee Bill.

"I am not afraid," she answered. "If you will let me take one of your revolvers——"

He had no intention of letting her take one of his weapons. He might need all his hardware for his own defense, for the queer situation was getting queerer all the time.

"I'll do better than that," said he, "for I'll go into the place with you."

Dropping his own reins over Chick-Chick's head, the prince of the bowie dismounted. Revolver in hand he placed himself at the girl's side, then kicked open the plank door with his foot.

Blank darkness opened before them. The interior of the house was as dark as a pocket.

The girl stepped across the threshold. Pawnee Bill moved forward with her.

Suddenly the door slammed. This was followed by a pistol shot. After that there was silence, as deep and impenetrable as before Pawnee Bill and the girl had entered the adobe.

The minutes passed. Chick-Chick shifted around restlessly, sniffing the air and no doubt wondering why his master did not return.

Possibly a quarter of an hour later, two figures came walking briskly toward the house and the horses from the foot of the slope. One of them was Lola Sebastian, and the other was an armed Mexican. Without a word, the girl bounded lightly into her saddle and galloped back around the spur. The armed Mexican took Chick-Chick by the dangling reins and led him off toward the mountainside behind the cabin.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SCOUT'S ENIGMA.

Buffalo Bill and Cayuse, piloted by Lone Dog, rode for three hours through the hot sun.

Lone Dog carefully avoided all trails. He explained that he was afraid of being seen by some of the red raiders guiding their enemies toward the medicine lodge. If any of the raiders should happen to see him, Lone Dog explained further, then the hand of every member of the

gang would be turned against him, and he would find himself in more trouble than the beaverskin medicine could ever get him out of.

The three horsemen came toward Camelback Mountain from the east. They reached the spur that jutted out from the mountainside under the notch and, just as Pawnee Bill and Lola Sebastian had done almost a dozen hours before, they skirted the base of the spur. Lone Dog, however, halted before they reached the point of the little ridge.

"Mebbeso raiders see Lone Dog if he go on," said the redskin. "Pa-e-has-ka find um medicine lodge on other side little hill. Give um medicine now and Lone Dog vamouso."

"You'll get your medicine, Lone Dog," answered the scout, "when I make sure you have brought us to the right place."

Digging into his war bag he drew out the beaverskin pouch and handed it to Cayuse.

"Keep possession of that, Cayuse," the scout went on, "until I investigate a little around the end of the spur. We'll make sure Lone Dog has carried out his part of the contract in good faith before we let him get away from us."

"Wuh!" muttered the Piute boy, laying the medicine bag across the withers of his horse and dropping a hand in which he gripped a revolver on top of it.

"Keep to this side of the spur," the scout went on, "and don't let Lone Dog lose your eyes for a minute."

Lone Dog's hungry glance was on the medicine bag, but the revolver and the determined look in the little Piute's eyes reconciled him to the situation.

"Pa-e-has-ka find um medicine lodge *muy pronto*," grunted Lone Dog. "Him no go inside till him come back, tell um Piute give um beaverskin to Lone Dog, huh?"

"When I come back and report," said the scout, "you'll get your medicine."

Without pausing further, he rode to the end of the spur, drew rein and peered cautiously around. He saw a small adobe house, one story in height, and with a plank door. The door was shut, and there was no sign of life about the spot.

The scout rode farther around the end of the spur; then, drawing rein again, he pulled the front of his hat brim down to shade his eyes and swept a keen glance over the vicinity of the cabin.

The side of the spur and the side of the mountain formed a right angle, the points of which opened out upon the flat desert. The adobe stood in the angle, about fifty feet from the foot of the spur and the same distance from the foot of the mountain.

Huge boulders cluttered the foot of the mountain, the sun striking sparks from the mica encrusted in their surfaces. Raiders might be hiding behind those boulders

but the scout had not the slightest reason for thinking so.

Lone Dog had said that Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore had come to the cabin. If they were anywhere, they should certainly be inside the adobe.

Again the scout's sharp eyes inspected the building. He was quick to observe the absence of windows.

At a distance, he rode around the house, thinking there might be openings in the other walls. But there were none.

"It's a house of mystery and no mistake," he muttered. "No windows! In a country as hot as this the interior must be stifling. And there's no sign of water! Why should any one build a 'dobe in such a waterless wilderness? There's no *maineral* in the mountain—the formations prove that—and gold is the only excuse for putting up a house in such a place as this. If Ponca Dave built it for a rendezvous—but then, Ponca Dave didn't build it. Those walls look to me as ancient as the walls of the Red House at Casa Grandé—and they were there when the Spaniards first came to the country, hundreds of years ago."

The walls, although perfectly intact, were battered, and scarred, and stained by time.

The excuse for the ruin Casa Grandé was to be found in the remains of old acequias which had once conducted water to the desert; but here there were no remains of acequias, and evidently no reservoir from which water could be drawn.

Puzzled, the scout approached nearer the front of the house. Then, for the first time, he discovered that there was something swinging from the door.

Slipping to the ground and running an arm through the looped bridle reins, he walked toward the entrance.

The rays of the sun, falling upon the door, struck a bright gleam from the handle of a knife embedded in the planks. Over the knife handle was hung a coiled riata.

But this was not all. Over the blade and the rope, rudely printed, were the words, "Come in—if you Dair!"

The scout's bewilderment increased. The door of that ancient house was certainly modern. The planks showed the marks of the steel teeth that had whipsawed them out of the tree trunk.

Ponca Dave, the scout reasoned, might have made and hung the door, but the rest of the adobe had been constructed by hands that had long since moldered to dust.

Something about the bowie knife in the door struck the scout as familiar. He gave it, and the rope, closer attention, and knew there was no mistake.

Pawnee Bill's bowie and riata! What mystery was here? Buffalo Bill started back astounded, his eyes on the rudely printed words.

It was a staggering problem that confronted the scout. The prince of the bowie had gone to Sebastian's *baile*. He had expected trouble—in fact, it was the uncertainties

of the call at Sebastian's that had made its appeal to him. Pawnee had not returned by sunrise, as he had said he would, and that proved that he had encountered difficulties he could not surmount.

But how was it that his knife and riata were here on the door of Ponca Dave's "house of mystery"?

The scout, wrestling with the enigma, allowed his mind to return to the conversation he had had with Nomad, regarding Cactus Blossom. The half-breed girl was a relative of Sebastian's, and Sebastian, with some one else at his *rancho*, had helped Cactus Blossom plan the aid given so successfully to Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore.

Had Pawnee Bill been captured, or dealt with in some worse manner, at Sebastian's place? How else could the prince of the bowie's Price knife have been placed in the position in which the scout now saw it, and his riata hung from the handle, unless disaster had overtaken the man from No Man's Land?

From these preparations, and from the lettered words on the door, it seemed to the scout as though his enemies had been expecting him at the house of mystery. Those words, "Come in—if you Dair," placed over emblems that indicated trouble for Pawnee Bill, were plainly a dare for his pards.

The "invitation" to enter, coupled with its threat, was on a par with that other bid that had been sent to the prince of the bowie.

What was there about this small adobe house, of ancient origin, that could offer danger? There was little room in it for mysteries of a dangerous kind. Unventilated, as it was, the air inside must have been like that of a furnace.

Why had Ponca Dave picked out such a place for a rendezvous?

The scout's eyes dropped to a well-beaten path that led to the door. This seemed to indicate that, in spite of the adobe's inhospitable appearance, it had been used extensively.

The scout, as he allowed his gaze to wander along the path, saw fresh hoofmarks in the earth. They had been made by shod hoofs. Easily he disentangled the prints from those left by Bear Paw.

One set of marks encircled the house, close to the wall. Coming back to the front again, they showed where the horse had stood and pawed restlessly. From that point, the hoofprints went off toward the slope of the mountain, preceded by marks of boot soles that indicated that the horse had been led. The other horse had gone galloping toward the point of the spur.

All these discoveries only bewildered the scout more, instead of doing anything to clear the mystery.

He started to follow the trail left by the led horse, but he had not proceeded far before the trail ran into rocky ground and faded.

Coming back to the front of the house again, he took up his original position and resumed his study of Pawnee Bill's knife and bowie, and the printed words.

Was a band of red raiders inside that stuffy house, waiting for him to enter?

His natural impulse was to draw a revolver, throw open the door and leap inside, discounting danger by his quickness. On second thought, however, he decided that he should proceed more carefully.

Pawnee Bill's safety might depend upon him, and to make one rash, ill-advised move would perhaps spell destruction for both his pard and himself.

Yet, if he did not throw open that baffling door, how was he ever to learn what was on the other side of it?

As he stood pondering, listening for some sound within that would tell of lurking foes, he heard a shot on the other side of the spur.

Here was an alarm which was tangible and clearly understood. Cayuse was having trouble. He would investigate that, and later give his attention to the medicine lodge.

He turned to step away from the door and remount his horse. At that precise moment the top of the heavy door was thrown outward, striking upon the scout's head and shoulders, hurling him to the ground. Bear Paw, with a frightened snort, leaped backward, tearing the looped reins off the scout's arm.

Buffalo Bill lay without sound or movement. A pall had dropped over his senses and left him helpless in the hands of his foes.

CHAPTER XIII.

PRISONERS IN THE ANCIENT REFUGE.

The scout opened his eyes in pitchy darkness. His head ached with the blow from the falling door, and he was several moments rallying his senses to the point where they had recently left him. He stirred a little and lifted a hand to his head.

"*Necarnis!*" muttered a voice.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the scout. "Is that you, Pawnee?"

"No one else, Pard Bill. Shades of Unk-te-hee, but this is a fine situation for the king of scouts and the prince of the bowie. We're right royally kiboshed, much as I hate to admit it. Call me a greaser, though, if I wasn't surprised when they lowered you down here! Where did you come from, anyway?"

The scout felt as though he had not yet secured a firm grasp on his reasoning powers. He lay quiet for a few minutes, and then sat up.

"You're as much of a surprise to me, pard," said he, "as I am to you. Where are we? In the house of mystery?"

"It's a house of mystery, all right," answered Pawnee Bill. "The adobe doesn't cover much surface ground, but it runs down pretty deep. That house is built over a hole in the desert, and when you walk in you step over the brink of a slide in the dark. When you're at the bottom of the slide, you're not in a condition to do much of anything to help yourself. At least, *necarnis*, that's how I figure it. I've been several hours working it out. I was lonesome, and that's all I had to do. But tell me about yourself, and how you happen to be here."

The scout dropped into the recital at once. As he went over past experiences, beginning with the escape of the two raiders from the Poverty Flat jail, his mind cleared as he took a fresh grip on the details. Pawnee Bill gave his entire attention, and was vastly impressed.

"*Necarnis*," said he, when the scout had finished, "that half-breed girl ought to have a prize! There is something distinctly humorous in the way she used the Ladies' Aid Society and three of the Cochise cattlemen to get that stuffed turkey to the two prisoners. As for the rest of it—that about the lost medicine bag and the way you dickered with Lone Dog for piloting you to this place—it lays a little over anything I ever heard before. Just what happened to you after you heard the shot on the other side of the spur?"

"I'm a little in doubt, as to that," returned the scout, "but I'm under the impression that the door of the adobe was thrown outward, and that I went down under it. After that there was a blank, and I came out of it to find you. They've got my guns," he added, his hands groping over his belt.

"They wouldn't have lowered you down here, *necarnis*, until they had made sure of your weapons. But there's some excuse for you, and not much for me. I was expecting trouble, when I dropped into this bag of tricks, but you lost out because of that double-acting door at the entrance to the medicine lodge."

"While I'm getting back into normal condition, Pawnee," suggested the scout, softly fondling the bruised place at the back of his head, "you might improve the time by letting me know how *you* happen to be here."

The prince of the bowie told of his brief experience at the *baile*, and of his attempt to get a line on Sebastian by taking the bait flaunted before his eyes by the Mexicana.

"I hadn't a notion what that girl was trying to do," declared Pawnee Bill, "but I just gave her all the rope she wanted. Of course, if I had known that Ponca Dave and Black Salvadore had made that getaway from the jail, very likely I'd have proceeded differently. But I didn't know that. I understand, now, that Lola Sebastian told the truth when she said that her father and his crowd wanted to even up with me for what had happened to Salvadore.

She only told that much of the truth, though, in order to inveigle me into a place where I could be dealt with without leaving too many evidences behind. If I had mysteriously disappeared during the *baile*, the sheriff and others would have come to Sebastian's looking for me. If the sponging out had been done at Sebastian's, something might have been found that would have proved disagreeable for Sebastian. So I was brought here.

"The señorita tried to get me to enter the adobe alone, and look for the mythical Tadeo. But I was wary and hung back. When she started in, I couldn't see much danger in entering the house at her side. That's where I made my mistake. As soon as we were past the door it slammed shut behind us. Then some one gave me a push from behind. I had time to fire—a blind shot in the dark it was—and then I toppled forward, struck a smooth slope and slid like lightning downward. I landed with a thump that left me as senseless as you were, and when I regained consciousness I was in this place, minus the twin destroyers and the Price knife.

"We're in a hole, *necarnis*, and affairs outside are in an altogether unsatisfactory condition. Nomad and the baron are trailing along toward Sebastian's, and they will probably have their hands full when they get there. As for Cayuse, probably Lone Dog made a jump for him in order to secure the beaverskin pouch, and the boy fired. Little Cayuse, I take it, will be the only one who comes out of this shake-up with anything like flying colors. For once in my life, Pard Bill, I'm considerably depressed."

"There's no use being depressed," said the scout. "We're neither of us on the retired list, Pawnee, and while we have the use of our hands and our heads we'll do what we can to make things interesting for our captors. Have you tried to find out what sort a place we're in?"

"I've used all my matches investigating. If you have any firesticks in your pocket, strike one."

The scout discovered that his matches had not been tampered with. He scratched one of the sulphur splinters over the rock floor, and as it flickered into a steady glow he looked around him.

What he saw was far from cheering. A sheer wall, circular in shape, arose on every side. Perhaps it was fifteen feet in height—the glow of the match did not illuminate the pit sufficiently for him to form any accurate estimate of the height of the walls. They were straight up and down and smooth. This precluded all hope of scaling them without a ladder, or a rope let down from above.

The pit was about twenty feet in circumference. Above it was a pall of impenetrable darkness.

"You say," remarked the scout, "that the adobe house sets over a hole in the desert, and that the extensive part of this rendezvous is subterranean?"

"That's the way I've figured it out, *necarnis*," answered Pawnee Bill. "The adobe house is simply a blind for these underground workings. I suppose, from the experiences I have gone through, that there's a strip of level ground just inside the door of the adobe; then, I think, there's a slide, with more level ground at the foot of it. After that comes this pit. I must have been lowered into it just as you were, one of the greasers or reds coming down to remove the rope. But all that happened while I was locoed, and unable to realize what was going on.

"When you were lowered, I was ordered to cast off the rope. I tried to climb the rope, but the whelps shot at me. Then, in order to stave off the fate the raiders seemed bound to hand out to the two of us, I obeyed orders."

"This can't be an old mine," mused the scout.

"Hardly, *necarnis*. Its' a natural formation—something of a natural freak, but old as the hills. It has been used, too, centuries before Ponca Dave's time. Strike another match and come this way."

The scout, scraping another firestick on the rocky floor, moved across the pit and halted at his pard's side.

"There," said the prince of the bowie, laying a finger on the wall, "read that. It was carved there a long time ago, but it hasn't been subject to wind or weather and is as plain as the day it was chiseled."

The following, neatly carved in the stone, was what met the scout's eyes:

"Aquí estaba el Gen. Dn. Do. de Vargas, quien conquistó a nuestra Santa Fé a la Real Corona todo el Nuevo Mexico a su costa, año de sixteen-ninety-two."

Which, translated, made the following:

"Here was the General Don Diego de Vargas, who conquered for our Holy Faith and for the Royal Crown, all the New Mexico, at his own expense, in the year sixteen-ninety-two."

The match dropped from the scout's fingers and he drew back and leaned thoughtfully against the wall.

"Pawnee," he remarked finally, "in the old days, when the Sapanish conquistadores were subduing the country, they had frequent refuges on the trail between the City of Mexico and Santa Fé, where, if any party was attacked by an overwhelming force of Indians, they could secrete themselves or find holding ground for a fight. Unless I'm far wide of my trail, pard, this rendezvous of Ponca Dave's is one of those ancient refuges. The adobe over the refuge, is of ancient construction, and that writing on the wall tells its own story."

"We're prisoners, then, in a hole in an ancient refuge of the Spaniards," said the prince of the bowie. "It

isn't much of a refuge for us, though, for it's plain we were dropped into this pit to starve to death at our leisure. And when we're done for, our fate will be a sealed book, so far as our friends are concerned."

"I suppose," returned the scout, "that that's the way of it. Did you see anything of Ponca Dave, or Black Salvadore, while I was being lowered into the pit?"

"I saw nothing of either of the scoundrels."

The scout, in thrusting a hand into his pocket to look for more matches, inadvertently drew something out that fluttered to the floor. He struck a match to see what it was, and the square of white cloth, taken from the beaverskin pouch, appeared before him, diagram side up.

"What's this?" demanded Pawnee Bill, dropping down on his knees and staring at the rough diagram.

"Something that came out of Lone Dog's medicine bag," answered the scout. "I don't think it amounts to anything, pard, although I did have a notion it might prove valuable."

"By the sacred O-zu-ha!" gasped the startled Pawnee Bill. "Call me a greaser, *necarnis*, if I don't believe this is a diagram of the adobe, up above, and of these underground workings. By Unk-te-hee, *I'm sure of it!*"

The scout was surprised—not that Lone Dog, who was one of the raiders, should have such a diagram—but that the thing should turn up, at that critical moment.

CHAPTER XIV.

WITH THE HELP OF LONE DOG'S "MEDICINE."

"It may be you're right, Pawnee," said the scout.

"I know I'm right, Pard Bill. Unless that crack on the head has played havoc with your wits, you'll know it too, in a brace of shakes. Drop down here beside me and keep the matches going."

The scout, on his knees at his pard's elbow, held the matches over the diagram while Pawnee Bill ran his finger over the lines.

"That oblong square," said the prince of the bowie, "is the ground plan of the adobe. There's the door, see? This line, entering the door and curving and angling off to the edge of the cloth, must be a guide for getting through the workings."

"We come in the door, like that, then we meet a slant—that slant, of course, is the slide. Down the slant we go to the level space at the bottom, then across and to the right. Now, by the sacred smoke, what does that other line mean off-shooting from the main one? It has quirks and dips, and finally comes back into the main line again."

"That second line," suggested the scout, by that time profoundly interested in the diagram, "comes down into this pit."

"But it gets out of the pit again and joins on to the principal line, *necarnis*!"

"Exactly. That circle is the pit, and the line comes into it. I reckon that's plain enough. There must be a way out of the pit, and that line probably affords the clue. There's a cross where the line crosses the pit and touches the opposite wall."

"We'll settle this right here," declared the prince of the bowie, jumping up. "If that cross means a way out, we'll get to the bottom of it."

"Move to the right a little, Pawnee," directed the scout, studying the diagram as he coned his pard's course. "There," he added, noting critically the position taken by Pawnee Bill, "right in front of you ought to be the place where that cross is marked on the diagram."

"Nothing here," announced the prince of the bowie disconsolately. "I wasn't expecting to find a grand staircase, but I did hope for a row of iron pegs. I—Hold up, hold up," he suddenly added. "Here's something—mud, or I'm a greaser!—mud, filling flush with the wall as neat a handhold as was ever gouged from rock. Why, pard," chuckled Pawnee Bill, "there are footholds and handholds, carved for our benefit all the way up and plastered over to fool us. I wish I could meet this Lone Dog and do something for him. Shall we climb?"

"Let's get the rest of the map firmly impressed on our minds first," answered the scout. "We want to know where to go, pard, when we reach the top of the pit."

"An-pe-tu-we!"

"We want to get the route so clear in our minds," the scout continued, "that we can go over it in the dark. The firesticks aren't going to last much longer."

"Let's get busy, then, and lose no more time."

Returning to the little square of cloth, Pawnee Bill sank to his knees again and gave it his attention.

"It's at the top of the pit," said he, "that the second line moves to the right and joins the main route. After that, there seems to be a straight shoot to another incline, or to a change in the course; then, so on and off the map."

"Off the map! And where can that be?"

"*Quien sabe?*"

"Perhaps," reflected the scout, "the line, entering by the door of the adobe, leads to another exit from the refuge."

"*Buenos!* That's a bull's-eye shot, and I'll gamble my spurs. Those old Spaniards, *necarnis*, had more than one way for getting out of these workings."

"We'll proceed on that supposition, anyhow," said the scout. "Have you got the map fixed in your mind, pard?"

"Clear as a chalk mark!"

"Then we'll begin to climb."

The climbing was done in the dark. Pawnee Bill, having located the chiseled holes in the wall, went first, groping upward and pushing his fingers through the sandy muck that filled the handholes, and hunting with the toes of his boots for the holes below.

The scout, following closely, used Pawnee Bill's feet for guides, slipping his fingers into a niche the moment the prince of the bowie withdrew his toes.

So, in the heavy gloom, the pards scaled the wall of their prison, profiting by the "medicine" taken from Lone Dog's beaverskin pouch.

Perhaps ten minutes after leaving the bottom of the pit, the pards scrambled over the brink and upon a surface of level rock.

"A turn to the right now," whispered the scout, "Be as quiet as possible, Pawnee, for there's no telling where we'll find the raiders."

"Mum's the word," was the answer. "Give me your hand, *compadre*."

They moved to the right carefully, and found themselves on the long level which led either to a turn in the route or to an incline.

They were in a passage—a bore cracked asunder in some primeval throes of the earth's crust. The wall they followed ran straight and was a safe guide.

Before they had proceeded far, the glow of a distant light struck on their eyes and a mumble of voices reached their ears.

"Shades of Unk-te-hee!" grumbled the prince of the bowie; "there's the gang, *necarnis*, planted squarely between us and freedom. Now what? I don't believe we could get out through the adobe in a thousand years. More than likely we'd break our necks trying it in the dark."

"Down on your knees, Pawnee," whispered the scout, "and crawl forward. We'll size up the situation at close quarters and figure out our chances. Keep close to the wall."

Pawnee Bill still wore his jingling hat. Removing it, he crushed it into small compass and stowed it in the front of his jacket. His spurs were also noisy, and he unbuckled them and pushed them into his pockets. After that, his forward progress was as silent as the scout could wish for.

As the light grew, and the sound of the voices increased, the creeping pards gathered that the passage ahead widened into a chamber of some proportions, and that the raiders were in this chamber.

The talking was in Spanish and Apache, but guarded as to tone, so that the pards could not distinguish what was being said. Reaching the place where the walls of the chamber broke away from the passage, they peered cautiously around the rock angles.

What they saw was surprising.

Resting on a blanket on a stone bench, in the centre

of the chamber, was the form of Ponca Dave. The form was stark and rigid, and in the ghastly glow of half a dozen candles it was not difficult for the pards to see that the leader of the raiders was dead.

Undoubtedly, the scout thought, a piece of flying debris, during the explosion in the jail, had caused a mortal wound. Ponca Dave had lived to reach his old rendezvous, but must have succumbed very soon afterward.

Near his dead leader, candle in hand, stood Black Salvadore. A grim, stony look was on the visage of the half-breed. The scout's eyes, dropping to Salvadore's waist, saw there his own belt and weapons.

Seven redskins and two Mexicans were squatted on the stone floor, near the bench and its gruesome burden.

As the pards watched the strange scene, Black Salvadore drew back, waved his candle and gave a command. One of the Mexicans and one of the Indians got up and proceeded to lift the edges of the blanket and to wind them about the still form of the raider.

At another command from Salvadore, the remaining Mexican and another Indian got up. The four lifted the blanketed form and bore it toward an incline at one side of the chamber.

Black Salvadore remained behind with one of the redskins; the rest followed the bearers of the body.

Five lighted candles were left in the chamber, sputtering around the bench. Black Salvadore and the Indian seated themselves on the bench, their backs toward the pards, and talked gutturally and in low voices.

Buffalo Bill slipped close to the side of the prince of the bowie.

"Salvadore has my guns," he whispered, "and that Indian with him has yours. The rest have gone to bury Ponca Dave. While they're away, pard, we have a chance to do something."

"Aye," murmured Pawnee Bill, "and it's a chance, as you might say, made to order. There are only two there on the bench, they have our guns and their backs are toward us. What more could we ask?"

"No more. If you're ready, come on!"

While the two raiders talked, and perhaps laid their plans for a new leader and fresh lawlessness, the pards crept toward them, noiselessly as serpents.

A coiled riata lay across the course taken by Pawnee Bill. Fortune, it appeared, was literally showering her favors upon the pards, for the riata was one of Pawnee Bill's. The prince of the bowie marked it with inward satisfaction and crept on.

When close to the stone bench, the scout paused behind Black Salvadore, and the prince of the bowie behind the Indian.

The scout signaled with his hand. The next instant, strong arms had closed about the two raiders and they were thrown from the bench to the floor.

Each of them fought desperately and tried to shout an

alarm, but tense fingers gripped the raiders' throats and prevented outcry.

CHAPTER XV.

AT CLOSE QUARTERS.

In that hand-to-hand struggle the advantage was all on the side of the two pards. While the scout struggled with Black Salvadore, the Indian abruptly brought his battle with Pawnee Bill to a finish.

The redskin was a powerfully built man and half rose under the weight of Pawnee Bill's body. With a quick heave, however, the prince of the bowie overset the fellow, and his head crashed against the edge of the stone bench.

The Indian dropped like a stone and lay motionless on the rocky floor.

"That's one for what I got, going down your blooming slide," growled Pawnee Bill, lifting himself and staring at the Indian to make sure he was not shamming.

Having reassured himself, and appropriated the belt and guns which the redskin had evidently claimed for his own, Pawnee Bill hurried to help the scout with Black Salvadore.

"I've got my riata, Pard Bill," panted the prince of the bowie.

"Then tie his hands with it, Pawnee," said the scout. "We'll leave his feet free, for he will have to travel with us."

The rope wizard was choice of his riatas and did not care to use them for tying refractory prisoners. In a case like the present, however, he bowed to necessity.

Between them the pards succeeded in getting Salvadore's hands bound securely at his back with one end of the riata. This was accomplished while the scout continued the pressure at the captive's throat with one hand and assisted Pawnee with the other.

"Now a gag," said the scout.

The prince of the bowie chuckled as he drew a square of white cloth from his pocket and twisted it into a rope.

"We'll gag him with Lone Dog's diagram," he laughed. "It has been good medicine for us, and I think it will do the business for Salvadore."

The gag was slipped between the half-breed's jaws and the two corners knotted at the back of his neck.

"Hold a gun on him, pard," requested the scout, "while I get my belt and guns."

Pawnee Bill handled a revolver with his right hand and wrapped the loose end of the riata about the other. Buffalo Bill, with a feeling of intense satisfaction, secured his belt and buckled it around his waist.

The prisoner was still on the ground, lying on his back and glaring malevolently up into the faces of the pards.

"Salvadore," said the scout, juggling one of his army

Colts in his hand, "for a very little I would shake a load out of this gun. Don't give me the opportunity, that's all. Get up, and lead the way out of here. What's more, don't hang back—it won't be healthy for you."

There was an edge to the scout's voice and it must have cut the half-breed's sulkiness to the quick. He got up and started toward the incline, two revolvers covering him as he walked, and Pawnee Bill clinging to the end of the riata.

The slope at the side of the chamber led upward. As the pards climbed it with their prisoner, daylight grew until they came out into a small basin, open to the sky and bordered with big boulders.

A surprise awaited them there, too, for nine saddle horses were tethered in the basin—one of them being Chick-Chick. Saddles and bridles were on all the horses, and under Chick-Chick's stirrup leather the prince of the bowie, to his delight, saw old Spitfire looking at him over the edge of the rifle case.

"When luck turns," commented Pawnee Bill, "she just naturally outdoes herself. I'll take Chick-Chick, *necarnis*, and you can requisition one of the other mounts. We'll let Salvadore pick out his own horse, and we'll tie him fast to the brute."

"Sharp's the word, pard," said the scout. "The rest of the raiders are likely to show up here, at any minute. We must be out of the way before that happens."

"We will be!" declared the prince of the bowie, with conviction. "Luck has taken a turn for the better and will throw everything our way."

They hurried with their preparations, binding the prisoner to his horse and the horse to Chick-Chick, and the scout cutting the most likely looking animal out of the horses that were left.

There was a well-defined bridle path leading between the boulders and out of the basin. Pawnee Bill took the lead, towing the prisoner's horse, and the scout brought up the rear to make sure the prisoner offered no resistance.

The basin was cut into the slope of the mountain, directly back of the old adobe and some twenty feet from the desert level. As Pawnee Bill emerged from the boulders and out upon the slope, a chorus of yells came from a distance.

"They've sighted us, *necarnis*!" roared the prince of the bowie. "Start Salvadore's horse—we'll have to make a run of it."

Buffalo Bill leaned forward and yelled and struck the led horse with the palm of his hand. The animal jumped forward, and all three of the horses went tearing down the slope at a run.

Revolvers began their merry music, but the firing was all on the part of the raiders and the range was too long.

Looking over his shoulder, the scout saw the burial party further along the slope. They had just finished

their work, it seemed, when they caught sight of Pawnee Bill. Every member of the party was in full cry, but a foot race promised but poorly with the pursued pards mounted and sliding toward the desert at a tearing gallop.

The raiders ceased firing, and, quite sensibly, changed their course, with the basin and the horses for their goal.

"Ride your best, Pawnee!" shouted the scout. "We want to save this prisoner at all costs!"

"We'll save him, compadre," flung back the prince of the bowie. "My spurs are in my pockets, but I don't need them with Chick-Chick. If that gang of reds and greasers overhauls us between here and Poverty Flat, then you can mark me up as a mighty poor prophet."

They were close to the point of the spur when the pursuers began flickering over the edge of the basin and down the mountainside.

"Whoa!" yelled Pawnee Bill suddenly, throwing himself back on his reins.

Chick-Chick sat down in the sand and the led horse came within one of running over him and his rider.

"What's to pay now?" demanded the scout, checking the animal he was riding.

"Between two fires, *necarnis*," was the other's cool response. "I guess we'll have to take to the boulders."

The patter of hoofs from behind faded into another sound of galloping from around the spur. The scout was picking out the most convenient boulders for a last stand when Nomad shot around the point of the spur on Hide-rack. After him came the baron on his Toofer mule, and behind the baron, neck and neck with Mortimer Degard, rode Dick Oberlee. Stokes followed.

The unexpected meeting of the party from town with the pards from the mountainside, brought momentary silence, then a whoop of jubilation and delight from all hands.

"Buffer, er I'm er Piegan!" howled the old trapper, waving his hat.

"Buffalo Pill und Pawnee Pill!" carolled the baron. "Vat you t'ink, hey? Und dey got dot Plack Salfatore, oder I don'd know vat I know. Hoop-a-la!"

"Just what I might have expected," grinned Degard. "But where is Ponca Dave?"

"Under a mound on the hillside," answered Pawnee Bill.

"Did you——"

"Not us," was the answer. "He was wounded when he and Salvadore blew down the jail wall, and it was that wound that finished him."

"Who was doing that shooting?" put in Oberlee.

The scout turned in his saddle and pointed rearward. The raiders were not in evidence in that direction. Scenting danger, they had shifted their course and were now a moving column of dust well off across the desert.

"Let 'em flicker!" said Degard. "We've run our

horses enough. Oberlee, go around the spur and have Cayuse come with Lone Dog and Cactus Blossom."

"Lone Dog and Cactus Blossom?" inquired the scout.

"Waal, yes," spoke up the trapper. "When the baron an' me an' the sher'ff an' party overhauled Cayuse, he was holding thet medicine bag in one hand an' drorin' er bead on Lone Dog with t'other. Cayuse allowed he wouldn't give up ther beaverskin pouch until you returned an' reported, not ef he had ter wait er week."

"But where does Cactus Blossom come into the argument, Nick?"

"Why, ther baron an' yores truly never went ter Sebastian's. Ye see, we overhauled ther half-breed gal on ther way thar. She put her hoss ter a run, an' thet excited our suspicions; then, when we come up with her, she admitted she was Cactus Blossom, an' we had her thet skeered thet she was leadin' us ter the medicine lodge when we met up with Degard an' party. We all come on tergether, findin' Cayuse lookin' over his sights at Lone Dog, an' B'ar Paw, minus a rider, standing clost in an' lookin' some distressed.

"Cayuse didn't know what had become of Pa-e-has-ka, an' he was plumb wild. While we was torkin' with him, we heerd shootin' over ther spur, left both pris'ners with Cayuse, an' rushed this way. Ye know what we found, an'— Waal, hyar comes Cayuse, now, fannin' his shooter an' drivin' his pris'ners ahead o' him. Baron, let's relieve ther Piute o' some o' his responsibility."

The baron and the trapper forthwith took charge of Lone Dog and Cactus Blossom, and Cayuse rode for the scout with a delighted "How!" and an outstretched hand.

Cayuse had endured several hours of worry on the scout's account, and Lone Dog had not proved easy to handle.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

Everybody, prisoners excepted, dismounted and flung themselves down in the shade of the boulders. A spirited talk followed, during which Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill went briefly over their experiences. These recitals naturally aroused interest in the house of mystery, and half the party went over to the adobe.

Pawnee Bill's riata was found, along with his famous Price knife, under the door, which was lying flat on the sand. Very fortunately the knife was not injured, although it might have been broken by the weight of the heavy door had it not been made of such sterling metal.

The prince of the bowie wrenched the knife free and dropped it into the empty scabbard at his belt, and picked up the riata and hung it over his shoulder.

"That's the nearest I ever came to parting company with Ta-koo-wan-kan," said he, "and it will be a mighty

clever outfit of tin horns that ever separates us like that again."

Carefully the interior of the adobe was examined. Pawnee Bill's deductions were borne out in every particular, for the cabin merely covered a rent in the earth. Just within the door was a narrow level of ground, then a steep descent leading down into darkness. At the side of the slide was a flight of steps, cut into the rock.

The slide measured some twenty feet, and at its lower end was another level space, with the open mouth of the pit beyond. Skirting the pit, the exploring party reached the passage, followed it to the chamber and there made the discovery that the Indian the pards had left behind had recovered and vanished.

All the horses were gone from the basin.

A visit was paid to the freshly heaped mound that hid Ponca Dave and his blasted fortunes, and then the party returned to the horses and the three prisoners.

The scout, removing the gag from Black Salvadore's jaws, tossed it to Lone Dog.

"Look at that," said he, "and tell me where you got it."

The Indian opened out the square of cloth and studied it grimly. Black Salvadore, who was near Lone Dog, got a good look at the diagram. The half-breed swore savagely.

"That was mine!" he cried. "I missed it an' reckoned it had been stole! Was you the one, ye red whelp?"

"Me take um," answered Lone Dog. "Him look like paper talk and heap good medicine; put um in beaverskin bag."

"You didn't know what it was, Lone Dog?" queried the scout.

"No sabe."

"Which shows, *compadres*," spoke up Pawnee Bill, "how chance sometimes takes hold of events and helps out a pair of pards like Buffalo Bill and me."

The scout took the beaverskin bag from Cayuse and gave it into the hands of Lone Dog.

"You're not a particularly good Indian," said the scout, "but a promise is a promise, and there's your medicine. Be an honest red from now on, Lone Dog. If you'll agree to that, I'll let you go."

"Me heap good Injun," was the prompt answer; "no make um trouble any more."

"Then clear out!"

Lone Dog stood not upon the order of his going, but, digging his moccasined heels into his cayuse, he vanished around the end of the spur.

Cactus Blossom was a comely looking half-breed, and the scout turned in her direction.

"You tried hard to save your brother and Ponca Dave, Cactus Blossom," said the scout, "and you came within one of making good. Who put up that scheme for you?"

Cactus Blossom looked toward her brother, but he kept his gloomy eyes averted.

"Me do um," said she. "No one helped."

"Didn't Sebastian help?"

She shook her head.

"Well, Sebastian got the bomb for you, and the files, and the little steel saw, eh?"

"Mebbeso."

"And Lola Sebastian wrote that invitation to the *baile* on the playing card, and you took it to the Spread Eagle Hotel and pushed it under Pawnee Bills' door?"

"Mebbeso."

"Then, when you had done that, you stole the turkey, took it to that deserted shack and dressed it and roasted it?"

The girl opened her eyes wide, but did not answer. Evidently she was amazed at the scout's knowledge.

"Later," proceeded the scout, "you concealed the bomb, the files, and the saw inside the turkey and tried three times to get into the jail to see your brother."

"All same," said Cactus Blossom.

"As a last resort, you called upon the Ladies' Aid Society for help, eh?"

"Call on Miss Skilo," returned the girl. "She plenty fine squaw."

A twinkle shone in the depths of Cactus Blossom's black eyes, and a smile twitched at the corners of her mouth.

"Well," proceeded the scout, "it's all past and gone, now. You did what you could for your brother and Ponca Dave, and your brother is once more a prisoner, while Ponca Dave has been brought suddenly to the end of his course. I am going to let you go back to Sebastian's, with a message. Will you carry it?"

"Ai."

Black Salvadore, surprised at this generosity of the scout's in releasing his sister, turned his moody eyes upon him.

"Tell Sebastian," said the scout, "that if he, or his daughter, attempt again to cross trails with Cody and pards, there'll be a dance of another kind at his *rancho*. Take off the ropes, Oberlee, and let the girl go."

"I reckon, Cody," demurred the sheriff, "that you're going too far. It was all right to let the Injun go, but this girl——"

"We're not making war on women, Oberlee," said the scout.

"But Cactus Blossom is dangerous!"

"Not when there isn't any Ladies' Aid Society to help her," put in Mortimer Degard. "Let her go, Oberlee. You're coming out of this with plenty of credit. Buffalo Bill has earned the right to do as he pleases."

The sheriff entered no further objections, and Cactus Blossom was allowed to go. She gave her brother a final look, thanked the scout, and rode off around the spur at a canter.

"What have you got to say before we take you back to Poverty Flat, Salvadore?" queried Oberlee.

"Nary a thing," was the half-breed's answer.

"Were you expecting me at that house of mystery?" asked the scout.

"They say ye're allers ter be expected whenever anythin' goes wrong with any o' yer pards," said the half-breed. "That's why I pinned Pawnee Bill's knife ter the door an' hung his riata over it. I allowed, ef ye come, ye'de see it, an' that ye'd try ter come inter the adobe. Then we'd git you, too."

"What were you going to do with Pawnee Bill and me?"

"Sponge ye out, so'st the raiders would hev a free hand in these parts. But what's the use?" finished the half-breed disgustedly. "Three times, now, ye've tackled the raiders with yer pards, an' three times the raiders hev got the worst o' it. I'm done. Do yer wust with me, an' I'll swaller my medicine."

"You'll get all that's coming to you, never fear about that," said Mortimer Degard.

"Friends," said Pawnee Bill, "if it's all the same to you, suppose we start for the Flat? I had my last meal yesterday, and yesterday seems a month ago."

"I peen a leedle hungry meinseluf," piped the baron.

"Ye're allers hungry, pard," grinned Nomad. "Never seen the time when ye wasn't. As fer me, I'd like ter come back hyar ag'in an' go over thet ole Spanish hangout."

"I've had enough of it," said the scout.

"Same here," supplemented Pawnee Bill. "The scout and I have a pair of cracked heads—and they're enough to keep the memory of that old hangout pretty green for a while."

"Let's ride," said Degard, climbing into his saddle. "It's after sundown. I want to get a good night's rest, for I'm going over and pay my respects to the Ladies' Aid Society in the morning."

Everybody mounted, and the party filed away into the gathering shadows.

THE END.

The next story is a bully one, full of snappy adventure and hairbreadth escapes, and has a smile or two as well. It is founded on an unusually happy idea of Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill to befriend a mysterious tenderfoot. In return he springs a surprise on the two pards that gives a sudden and astonishing jolt, leads you off on an exciting trail, and makes you keen to see the finish. There are some riding stunts in this tale that fairly take your breath away. Altogether it is the sort of story that ranks as a winner. The title is "Buffalo Bill's Blockade; or, Pawnee Bill and the Tenderfoot." Out next week in No. 486. It's such an exciting tale, you'll be sorry if you miss it.



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FOR THE CZAR.

"The dispatches will fall into our hands safely enough, I tell you," said one of a party of six Russians who were seated round the stove of a rude log cabin in Peterof, where miscellaneous stores were sold to the peasantry.

"Ivan is always so very sure of success," grumbled a thick-set man, who sat opposite to him; "for my part, I am not so certain that we shall get hold of them—in spite of its simplicity, the plot is dangerous enough, if it should fail," he added, for failure they all knew meant death to them or exile.

"Fail! Wait till you hand' your share of the rubles we are promised in return for the dispatches. Why did you join us in the affair if, at the first scent of danger, you must turn coward?"

"I, Deloffski, a coward!" cried the second speaker, as he rose from the rough wooden bench and faced the others, clenching his right hand angrily. "Which of you believes that?"

The rest glanced up at the burly form of the Russian as he stood there, clad in heavy furs and great boots, whose tops reached to his thighs, but not one of them responded to his implied challenge.

"If you two mean to go on quarreling in this unguarded way," interposed a Finn, whose shaggy sheepskin garments seemed well in keeping with the bitter cold wind blowing without the cabin, "we might as well give the whole plan up." He lowered his voice as he muttered: "One would think that boys have no ears!"

The Finn glanced uneasily toward the far end of the log building where three boys sat, two of them engrossed, apparently, in a game of checkers, while the third, who was the son of the storekeeper, stood looking on.

"Bah!" retorted Ivan, "you will never succeed in anything if you give way to such silly fears; the boys are too much interested in their game to listen to us—suppose they have listened, what can they do? In an hour our plan will have succeeded, for if our spy within Cronstadt has given us the exact time of departure, the ice yacht has just started for St. Petersburg."

"Where it will not arrive quite so soon as those on board expect it to," added one of the Russians, with a smile. "In half an hour or less we must set out."

Although Ivan had spoken so slightly of the presence of the three boys, he turned away from his companions and sauntered leisurely toward where the game of checkers was in progress.

"Black wins!" he said encouragingly to the younger of the two players; "so I am just in time to see the end of the game!" Then, pointing to a parcel of goods already tied up, he continued: "You had best go now, perhaps you are wanted at home."

No sooner were the boys outside than the elder caught his brother by the arm.

"Paul," he whispered, "did you hear what was said in the store?"

"Not much of it," the latter answered; "it could not be very important—the men spoke so loud."

"There you are wrong—they spoke loudly because they were on the point of quarreling. For the czar's sake, I listened, and this is what I learned from their long discussion. You know that every day war is expected to be declared, and that both in Russia and Turkey men are said to be bribed to get information for the enemy. Cronstadt is our great fortress and the key to the Gulf of Finland—remember, it is only thirty versts from there to St. Petersburg! It is perfectly certain to me that some one within the fortress has betrayed the secret of the dispatch of certain valuable papers from Cronstadt to St. Petersburg, and that these men mean to get them, to hand over for a bribe to the enemy."

The younger boy glanced into the other's face in alarm.

"What can be done?" he asked anxiously.

"It is useless to try to raise an alarm in Peterof—time is too precious for that. From a remark of Ivan's I fancy the Russian in command of the approaching ice yacht is the confederate who has given them the particulars concerning the dispatches. At all events, Ivan declared that the yacht would be made to sail straight for the peril or great ice crack which is said to lie halfway between here and Cronstadt. If nothing worse happens, the runners of the yacht will sink through the rotten ice and fling all the occupants out with a jerk onto the ice field. In the confusion the six men we have heard discussing the plot will make for the spot in the small yacht which they have ready, as you see. Under pretense of rendering assistance they mean to get possession of the dispatches. As one of them said, the plot is simple enough, and it is my belief they will succeed in it unless some one warns those plotted against of their danger."

"Who is to do that?" the younger boy asked.

"There is no one in Peterof who will, unless we do," his brother answered.

"How is it to be done?" Paul asked. "The Russians will have to start in about a quarter of an hour from here to the great ice crack. If we managed to get into their ice yacht without being observed we could never control it. The sail is such a great lug that our strength would be spent in vain."

"There you are right," his brother assented; "I thought of that, but, as you say, to manage the yacht between us would be impossible."

Paul glanced at the skates which hung on his brother's arm, then said dubiously:

"Do you think, with a quarter of an hour's start, we could outdistance the men if they pursued us?"

Michael, the elder of the two boys, who had noticed where his brother's glance rested, stood still for a minute, pondering over the suggestion. Then stowing away under a boat, which lay by the shore keel uppermost, the parcel which he was carrying, he sat down and quickly began to fasten on his skates, a movement which Paul at once imitated.

Living at Peterof, beside the Gulf of Finland, which is frozen over so long during the winter, both boys were expert skaters. Indeed, before entering the store, they had been disporting themselves for some time on the transparent and deep blue stretch of ice bordering the Russian village.

"We can make the attempt, at all events," Michael answered, at last, as he felt carefully the straps of his skates. "We had better make a detour first, in case we are watched."

Side by side the two boys struck out in a direction which was at right angles to the way they intended eventually to

go. They had hardly taken a dozen swift curves with either skate when the form of Deloffski, the Russian, appeared at the doorway of the store, and behind him looking over his shoulder with difficulty, was the man known as Ivan.

"There," said Ivan, with a laugh, which was meant to discomfit the other; "your head seems to be full of nothing but idle fancies; because the two boys take a turn on the ice you are foolish enough to suppose they mean mischief. Let that satisfy you."

He pointed to the boys already far out on the ice, and who seemed to be making for the ice road which led in a direct line from Cronstadt to St. Petersburg.

"If they go that way it will take them so long that our object will be accomplished long before they can do us any mischief, as you are so readily inclined to suppose."

A hundred yards apart and marking out the boundaries of the ice track rose up a long line of tall poles, painted in two colors. Halfway between the nearest of these and Peterof, the boys suddenly swept round on their skates, and then it was Deloffski's turn to scout the other Russian's words.

"Look for yourself, Ivan," he cried hoarsely; "the boys are making straight for Cronstadt!"

Ivan thrust open wide the door of the log hut, which had partly closed upon them, as he called out to the others within:

"Quick! To the yacht or we are lost!"

Without stopping to question him further, the rest followed as he ran forward and leaped into the ice yacht, immediately grasping the tiller. In a few seconds the great lug was hoisted, it bellied out as the stiffish breeze which was blowing caught it, and away over the ice they went, the other five Russians sitting with their backs to windward, as the custom is, in order to balance the yacht. The heavy lug tugged at the bolt ropes till a landsman would have thought the tension more than the stout ropes sewed to the sails could possibly bear, as on they sped, the steel runners ringing on the ice as Ivan tacked with the utmost skill.

"We shall stop them yet," cried the steerer. "It is plain that we are gaining on them, and they must skate across our track ahead if they mean to avoid the ice crack."

"It's a chance whether or not they know where the peril lies," answered the Finn. "If they don't, the pair of boys will run into danger such as they little expect. Anyway, beyond that ice crack they must not go, dead or alive," and to this remark the others without demur assented.

Meanwhile the two brothers became aware of the pursuit, and redoubled their efforts to outdistance their pursuers. On with a mad dash they went, and yet nearer, perceptibly nearer, as they glanced round from time to time, they saw the yacht looming up with its great sail almost sweeping the ice in front as the wind filled it.

"If we only knew the whereabouts of the ice crack I should be less afraid," cried Paul, as he caught the sound of Ivan's hoarse voice, which came far across the ice plain commanding them to stop.

"We must keep on, come what will," Michael answered him back, in a dogged manner which showed the boy's pluck and determination, two qualities for which he was well known among his companions in Peterof. "Remember our journey is for the czar!"

"While you go on I will not lag behind," Paul added, with a dash of his brother's spirit in his tone, and then without speaking more, they bent forward.

Closer to them the pursuing ice yacht drew; then the elder of the two boys struck out to the left of the course they had taken, uttering a few words of warning to Paul as he did so.

"Look out!" he cried, "the ice crack is just in front. We must skate along till we come to the end of it."

His warning came too late!

Try as he did to his utmost, Paul could not check himself in time. He twisted round, it is true, but in doing so lost his

balance, and, with his arms flung up in despair at the fate which threatened him, the boy fell over the edge of the ice into the depths below.

Hearing the cry of horror which came from his brother's lips, Michael quickly turned about. Then, on his hands and knees, he crawled to the edge of the ice and looked down.

"My hands are badly cut, and I am a little bruised, that's all," cried Paul from below; "the ice is solid enough beneath me."

And, to his brother's great joy, he stood up as well as he could on his skates.

"Let down your fur coat and haul me up," the boy continued.

Michael instantly flung off the garment, and by means of it managed to drag his brother onto the upper stratum of ice again.

"What an escape!" he cried, pale to his lips as he saw the lacerated state of Paul's hands.

The latter suddenly started to his feet.

"Listen!" he cried; "we have forgotten our pursuers—they are almost upon us! Come, let us dash off once more."

Without waiting to clothe himself with the coat which he had thrown off, Michael, bathed in a profuse perspiration with his exertions, struck out, and on together they went again, wondering if it would be possible to still carry out their purpose after losing the few precious minutes they had, owing to Paul's accident.

"Stop—stop, I say!" they heard Ivan shouting out from the fast-following ice yacht; but no answer they returned, nor did they slacken their headlong pace.

So near was the vessel that the skaters could hear the Russians debating what course to pursue, for the ice track was beginning to become roughened, and the steel runners of the yacht skidded several times.

"They are no nearer!" cried Michael encouragingly to Paul, whose strength was beginning to give way. "Keep up, keep up; for the last minute or more they have got no nearer. I fancy we are a little more ahead of them than we were."

"Will you stop, I ask?" Ivan thundered out.

For one second Michael turned and glanced back at the Russian.

"No!" he cried, "that is our only reply."

The Finn rose from his seat in the yacht and made his way close to where Ivan was at the tiller.

"There is only one way of stopping them," he said, tapping the handles of a pair of pistols which were thrust into his sheepskin belt.

"Then stop them—that way or any other; what does it matter so long as they don't wreck the plan we have made!"

"The report may be heard a long way off; a pity it is that pistols make such a noise!"

Ivan looked at him angrily.

"One would think there was only a solitary man aboard the yacht," he answered, referring to himself. "Go on, I say. Shoot them both!"

The Finn moved to the left side of the yacht, and taking deliberate aim at Michael, who was the nearer to him, he fired.

"You have missed!" cried Ivan. "You forgot to allow for the wind. Here, catch hold of the tiller and keep it steady for ten seconds."

He took the second pistol from the Finn's belt with scant ceremony, as the latter reluctantly carried out his order, then covered the boy whom the Finn had missed.

"It's too late, Ivan!" cried one of the plotters, as he caught the Russian by the elbow. "See, the yacht we meant to overset is coming rapidly toward us."

Ivan dropped the pistol to his side just as Michael—whose nerves, like his brother's, were almost overwrought at the Russian's last desperate attempt to stop their career—caught sight of the oncoming yacht.

"Shout, Paul!" he exclaimed. "Shout, for if the yacht runs much nearer it will get on the rotten ice."

The two boys raised a cry together, which they repeated as they still dashed onward, for they were well past the extremity of the great ice crack at that moment. No response reached them, except that Ivan, who saw that the game was lost, hastily leveled his pistol again, but like the discomfited Finn's, his missile whistled harmlessly through the air, then deeply imbedded itself in the ice. A third time the boys uttered their warning cry.

"They hear us at last!" cried Michael joyfully, for some one leaned over the side of the yacht which was coming from Cronstadt and fluttered a handkerchief in the air.

The Russians, foiled in their plot to get possession of the dispatches, put their yacht about and gave up the pursuit, nor were they afterward captured, so well did they manage their escape. As soon as Michael and Paul skated up to the czar's yacht they were taken aboard, and the officers gathered round them, listening with anxious faces as they heard from the elder boy the account of the plot and how it was frustrated. The steersman, as was rightly conjectured, was implicated in the affair, for which he was imprisoned at St. Petersburg on arrival of the czar's yacht—which happened without accident of any kind.

As for Michael and Paul, their bravery was handsomely rewarded by the czar in person, to whom the story was at once told. In any peasant's hut on the borders of the Gulf of Finland he who visits there may hear of this strange adventure and the risk the two boys ran for the czar just before the outbreak of the last memorable war in which Russia engaged.

A PASSENGER IN CHAINS.

"When you are traveling in India you are apt to have strange companions," said E. C. Thurber, managing director of the British branch of one of the American oil companies. "I remember a night that I spent on the train going from the north of India down to Lucknow, which furnished the most uncomfortable three or four hours of my life.

"First-class coaches on the Indian railways are divided into compartments containing two sofas and two upper berths, which are let down at night. You furnish your own bedding.

"When I got on the train I was the only foreigner on it, and I had a compartment to myself. So at bedtime I turned in with a great deal of satisfaction, confident that I would not be disturbed.

"About two o'clock in the morning, as the train stopped at a junction point for the railway from the sacred city of Benares, I was awakened by a commotion outside and a lot of shouting and screaming such as you hear only in India. The solitary lamp that lighted the compartment had gone out and I was in darkness.

"I was turning over with a growl at being awakened when I heard the door handle creak and a voice demanded in fairly good English whether I was the only occupant of the compartment. I replied that I was, and then in the gloom a man climbed into the compartment. Then he reached out to assist some object—what it was I could not make out—into the car.

"There was a sound like the rattling of chains. I thought at first the traveler was lifting up a big dog. Whatever it was, it crept along the other side of the car, jumped upon the sofa opposite, and remained perfectly quiet.

"No words passed between the man and the object, and after lying there a few minutes I began to get uncomfortable. Perhaps it was a young tiger, or a big monkey, or perhaps it was some prisoner. Or perhaps—here I remembered having heard that a maniac woman had escaped somewhere in this very neighborhood a few days before.

"Just as I had reached this point in my reflections the man, in whose hands I had noticed something long and thin, like a rifle barrel, got up. The end of the object swung very near my face as he turned it around and put it in a rack near

me, and I broke out in a cold perspiration. As soon as he had taken his seat I reached up cautiously and touched the object, and found to my relief that it was only one of those long staves which the people in India use in walking.

"Then I tried to engage the man in conversation, but he answered in monosyllables. I was lying in my pajamas, and I became so uneasy that I drew on my trousers and got up. I asked the man whence he had come, and he replied that he had just reached the junction on the train from Benares, which was an hour late. He was so short in his replies that by the time we reached the next station I had made up my mind to get out and complain to the station master.

"So when we stopped, I alighted and found that functionary, who at my request turned his lantern into the carriage, but I could not see the object on the farther berth.

"Is it customary to allow prisoners to travel in first carriages?" I demanded.

"Sahib, I know the gentleman," he replied, 'and he has no prisoner.'

"I was not satisfied with the guard's reply and insisted upon his turning the lantern into the compartment again. At this the Hindu inside, who had been dozing, arose and came out upon the platform. He exchanged some words in Hindustani with the station master, and then he turned to me.

"Sir, it is my wife that I have traveling with me," he said.

"Well, I wondered what a man was doing dragging his wife about with him by a chain, for the rattling continued at intervals, so I decided to remain up, and began to smoke.

"The traveler thawed after his explanation, and I found him a very intellectual man. He gave me much information about northern India. Suddenly he asked me whether I belonged to the craft, and upon my replying that I did, he informed me that he was master of his lodge.

"As daylight approached I would cast an inquiring look in the direction of the other occupant of the compartment. When it got light I found to my surprise that the woman, whose face was heavily veiled, was swathed in a beautiful silk robe. She wore sandals and as I glanced at them I discovered that what had aroused my alarm was a multitude of anklets and bracelets.

"It is the custom in India for a man to show affection for his wife by loading her with such trinkets, and that particular Hindu displayed more devotion in that way than any other I ever came across. He did not introduce her to me, nor did he address a single word to her while they were in the car. He had violated the road's rules by bringing his wife into the compartment, but knowing I was not a Hindu he thought I would not object. The following day I learned that he was the chief government auditor for the railways of that district."

EXCEEDINGLY CAUTIOUS.

A gentleman once told a strange story, one that, like so many other true stories, was difficult to believe.

His auditors showed by their manners that they doubted, and so he appealed to another gentleman who had been present at the time to confirm the truth of his statement.

To his amazement, this man replied stiffly, and said: "I regret that I do not remember the circumstances to which you allude."

The next day both these persons met, and the first gentleman said:

"But can't you really remember those extraordinary circumstances?"

"Oh, yes," replied the second.

"Then why the dickens did you say you didn't, when I asked you about them before?" inquired Mr. One indignantly.

"Ah!" replied Mr. Two, "I saw that the company, all of them, took you for a liar, and I wasn't going to be taken for another!"

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